不登校さん!?

健速
Takehaya

11

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」（HJ文庫）で作家デビュー。
あまりの暑さに負け、新たにクーラーを設置。懐事情が厳しい今日この頃。

ポコ

兵庫県出身のイラストレーター。
好物はやきそば。最近は最近はスーパーの三食一袋の焼そばにハマリ中。

カバーイラスト／ポコ 装丁／渡辺宏一

六畳間の侵略者!? 11

健速 Takehaya

た03-02-13

健速

六畳間の侵略者!? 11

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HOBBY JAPAN

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【ころな荘一〇六号室】の人口密度が急上昇してからはや一年。それぞれの想いが育つ中、季節はふたたびの春が巡ってきた。孝太郎が帰れば、部屋では幽霊と魔法少女がアニメに一喜一憂し、宇宙人と地底人と大家が食事を作っている。そんな光景が当たり前になっていたある日――
「どうしたんだ、その姿はっ!?」
突然、早苗の輪郭が薄れ始めた。

HOBBY JAPAN

LOVE
IS
ALL
六畳間の侵略者!?
11

「早苗、こうだ」

『そっかぁ、こうなのかぁ』

「さとみさっ、たすけっ、
いいだだだだだぁっ！」

……

訳の分からないゆりかは反射的に孝太郎に助けを求めたが、
その孝太郎こそが激痛の原因だった。

―あのさ、孝太郎。
―どうした？
―今のうちに伝えておきたい事があるんだけど。
―後じゃまずいのか？
―今ならさ、絶対に誤解なく
伝えられるかなって思って。
それに……

六畳間の侵略者!?
キャラクター勢力図

魔法少女

藍華真希（あいかまき）
ゆりかの敵、
悪の魔法少女【ダークネイビィ】。

虹野ゆりか（にじの）
自称“魔法少女”。一◎六号室に
危機が迫っていると主張する。

幽霊

東本願早苗（ひがしほんがんさなえ）
ころな荘一◎六号室に取り憑く
幽霊少女。

宇宙人

ティアミリス・グレ・
フォルトーゼ
皇位継承の試練のため、
一◎六号室とその住人の支配を狙う。

クラリオーサ・
ダオラ・
フォルトーゼ
ティアの家と敵対している
宇宙人皇女。

ルースカニア・
ナイ・
パルドムシーハ
ティアの付き人で世話係。

一般人

笠置静香（かさぎしずか）
孝太郎の同級性で
ころな荘の大家さん。

松平賢治（まつだいらけんじ）
孝太郎の幼なじみで親友。

ころな荘の住人

里見孝太郎（さとみこうたろう）
ころな荘一◎六号室の、
いちおうの借主で主人公。

桜庭晴海（さくらばはるみ）
孝太郎の所属する編み物部の部長で、
一年先輩。ちょっと病弱。

地底人

クラノ＝キリハ
一◎六号室を足がかりに、地上侵略を狙う?

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三月十六日（火）
チューリップ……007

三月十六日（火）
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Tulip

Part 1

March 16, Tuesday

As March begins, clubs have an important job to do. And that is to recruit new members.

As a public school, Kitsushouharukaze has entrance exams on two different dates, and those results are announced on the 5th and 20th of March. Since club activities are so active in the school, none of the clubs have the time to wait for the entrance ceremony, and instead the intense battle to recruit promising new students start on the days that the results of the entrance exams are announced.

Of course, both Koutarou and Harumi of the knitting society will be taking part in this recruiting battle. In preparation for that day, they had come to the mall to purchase some things. The two were quite motivated and weren't just ready to use the remaining club funds, but also their own money.

“We have to recruit some for the second announcement.”

“I'm sorry for not being useful.”

“T-That's not what I meant!”

A certain reason was behind their motivation. Since the first announcement had gone by without any satisfactory results, they decided to bet on the second announcement.

On the day of the first announcement, Harumi had been caught by the members of the drama club and forced to wear a dress and help the drama club with their own recruitment. As a result, Koutarou was left to recruit for the knitting society on his own, and his results were lacking as he was unable to find a new applicant. The knitting society wasn't very popular to begin with, and having a lone boy looking for recruits completely backfired.

As such, the two decided that they had to successfully recruit someone on the second announcement.

“It doesn't look good if the president of the society is not present, does it?”

“Supposedly, the drama club will be changing how they recruit for the second announcement so we'll be fine.”

The drama club could normally be called a small club, but this year they saw a great increase in applicants. The two plays that they had put on last year had been very well received and played a large part in the increase in applicants. Just by having Harumi stand by the drama club's reception wearing Alaia's dress was enough to attract attention.

Because of that, the drama club was satisfied with the amount of applicants they had gotten and decided not to use Harumi for the second announcement day. Instead, they were going to line up their good-looking boys and cross-dressing girls and attract those into that. Since neither Koutarou and Harumi had anything to do with that, the knitting society would be able to properly recruit with both its members.

“But…”

Despite that, a small worry was budding in Harumi's chest.

I would be happy if we get more club members… but then it won't just be me and Satomi-kun…

Since she was so responsible, Harumi absolutely wanted new members. She wanted to avoid the knitting society from shutting down during her and Koutarou's time. That's why she wanted

to recruit at least one new girl before Koutarou was left alone, since it was obvious what would happen if Koutarou was left to recruit on his own next year.

But at the same time, she also had the feeling of not wanting anyone to intrude on her time alone with Koutarou. To her, the time spent during her club activities with the boy she loved was very precious. That's why the woman inside of her wished for the society to continue with just the two of them.

Those two desires clashed and caused Harumi's expression to look somewhat lonely.

“Is something wrong?”

Noticing Harumi's expression, Koutarou peered at her face.

“Ah, u-uhm… I was just thinking that if we get more members, w-we'll, probably have to change how we do our activities…”

Harumi hurriedly gave an ambiguous answer. She couldn't say what was really on her mind no matter what, so this was the best she could do.

“Ah, right, it's always just been the two of us. If we do get more people, we'll be able to do more things, so we need to think about that too.”

Koutarou nodded at Harumi's words. Since he had been in a baseball club before, he was very well aware of what it meant when the amount of members increased. There was a big difference between the club having 18 members and being able to play among themselves, or if they were below that amount and had to play against teams from other clubs. Of course, the knitting club was probably not like the baseball club, but there should be some change in the club activities. Knowing that, Koutarou ended up further away from Harumi's true intentions as a result.

“…There will be a lot of things we can't do… geez…”

Harumi mumbled in a whisper so that Koutarou couldn't hear her.

She wouldn't be able to feed Koutarou cookies she had made herself. They wouldn't be able to listen to new CDs they had bought together. She wouldn’t be able to get Koutarou to try the new lunch box she had made. And she wouldn't be able to secretly have Koutarou rest on her lap when he fell asleep.

If they got more club members, they wouldn't be able to do stuff that usually only lovers do in club rooms. This was a serious problem for Harumi.

“I'd love to do an exhibit during the culture festival. Of course… I'm sure my works will be a disaster.”

However, Koutarou seemed completely unaware of Harumi's intentions and was carefreely thinking of what would happen if they got more club members. Seeing that, Harumi puffed up her cheeks and showed an expression more childish than one would expect from her.

“What's with that strange face.”

“…Satomi-kun you nincompoop.”

Since Harumi looked so adorable when she said that, Koutarou couldn't contain himself.

“W-What now, all of a sudden! Ahahaha!”

“Nincompoop is nincompoop! Satomi-kun you nincompoop!”

Since she believed it was still too early, Harumi hadn't spoken what was really on her mind. However, she was still frustrated that he didn't understand, so she didn't back down right away. As a result, it took a while before Koutarou could stop laughing as her cheeks were puffed up.

Tulip

Part 2

After finishing buying what they needed, such as a styrofoam signboard and permanent marker, the two had come to a bus stop. Harumi would be taking the bus there home.

“From time to time, you are extremely cute, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Koutarou recalled Harumi from a little while ago and began giggling. In response, Harumi's face turned red and she looked down.

“P-Please forget about that.”

“No way. I'll remember that for a while whenever I need to laugh.”

“Satomi-kun, you meanie…”

With her face dyed red, Harumi cast her glance upwards and appealed, before looking down again. Even her neck had gotten red, and since she was normally so pale, the vivid red really stood out.

I guess I bullied her a little too much… I'll stop it here…

With that in his mind, Koutarou decided to stop speaking, put his luggage on the ground and began spinning his arms in circles.

“What are you doing?”

Noticing those movements, Harumi raised her head. She chased after his arms with her eyes while having a confused look on her face. She was gradually turning back into her normal self.

“Actually, my shoulders have been feeling stiff lately.”

Koutarou stopped spinning his arms and spoke to Harumi. He then formed a fist with his right hand and beat at the scruff of his neck.

Koutarou's stiff shoulders wasn't something he had made up for the sake of changing the topic. In fact, lately his shoulders had been getting stiffer. He had been getting in all kinds of trouble this year, so he figured that this was because of fatigue.

“Stiff shoulders…”

After looking at Koutarou's movements for a moment, Harumi finally showed a large smile.

“That's right, Satomi-kun, should I massage your shoulders?”

Harumi felt like her own idea was fun and she smiled as she began grasping the air in front of her.

Harumi's gesture this time around was even more adorable than when she had puffed up her cheeks and Koutarou almost burst out laughing. However, since she had offered to help, he didn't want to get on her bad side again and desperately held back his laughter.

“P-Please do.”

“Then please sit down over there, Satomi-kun.”

As she cheerfully moved her fingers, Harumi gestured for Koutarou to sit down on the bench by the bus stop. As he made his way there, Koutarou tried his hard to hold back his laughter, and if he let his guard down even for a moment, he would burst out laughing.

“You seem really stiff.”

“Pff.”

Tulip

Harumi misinterpreted Koutarou's odd behavior and then moved behind him as he sat down. He was probably lucky that he couldn't see Harumi's expression at this time. If he had, he would almost definitely have burst out laughing and offended her.

“Here I go.”

“Okay.”

Harumi put her slender fingers on Koutarou's shoulders.

Satomi-kun's back…

Harumi stopped moving. With the stocky shoulders and wide back in front of her, she was driven by an urge to hug him. When she imagined embracing Koutarou and whispering into his ear that she loved him, Harumi's heart began racing and her face turned red. Her body stiffened and she was unable to move.

“Senpai?”

Confused that Harumi had stopped moving, Koutarou turned around to look at her. And his carefree glance freed her from her frozen state.

“Is something wrong?”

“Uhm, it's been a while since I massaged someone's shoulders… so I was wondering how I should do it…”

“Ah, feel free to be rough. I am built pretty sturdy.”

Koutarou smiled and looked forward again. He didn't seem to have notice Harumi's situation at all.

“Okay, then…”

Seeing that, Harumi felt relief and she began to move her fingers. Since he said that she could put some strength into it, Harumi poured quite a bit of force into her fingers.

Tulip

“Sakuraba-senpai, that kind of tickles.”

“Eh, are you okay if I put more force into it?”

Harumi's eyes opened wide in surprise. To her, she was using plenty of strength, but since she was so weak, her efforts only served to tickle Koutarou.

“I-It feels kind of vaguely lacking. Wahahaha!”

“Okay… then, I'll do it a little harder…”

Seeing Koutarou laughing, Harumi poured all of her strength into her fingers.

“Ah, now it's getting good.”

When she did, Koutarou stopped laughing. Harumi had finally reached the force Koutarou desired.

“…Y-You're not just big, but sturdy as well, Satomi-kun.”

Harumi was amazed as she massaged Koutarou's shoulders with all of her strength.

To Harumi, Koutarou's body didn't look like it had the muscles of that of a body builder. But as she touched him, she could tell that his muscles were regularly trained. It was a big difference from her father's body.

“I'm working hard at my part-time job at the archaeological digging site after all.”

Koutarou's body had been built up because of his continuous training after he had gone to Forthorthe. But of course, he didn't touch on that topic.

Since Harumi looked like the spitting image of Alaia, he often finds himself almost speaking about Forthorthe. However, even if he told her, she would just be puzzled, so he took care not to talk too much.

“That part-time job sounds rough.”

“And thanks to that I'm getting buffed up… Waahh!”

Koutarou turned around to speak to Harumi and at the same time he flexed his muscles a little.

“Kyaa!?”

The shoulders that Harumi was massaging tensed up and easily pushed back her slender fingers.

“Geez, Satomi-kun! It won't be a massage like this!”

Harumi complained to Koutarou while clenching her fists, but her appearance was hopelessly lacking in force as she was so far distanced from violence.

“Puh.”

However, that lack of force caused the strength to leave Koutarou's shoulders. As he saw her puffed up cheeks with her small fists held up in front of her chest, and since he had been holding it in from before, Koutarou couldn't keep himself from laughing.

“S-Sakuraba-senpai, pfff, ahahahahaha!”

“Satomi-kun!”

“I-I'm sorry! Y-You just looked so adorable, I couldn't help myself, *cough* *cough*”

“You don't have to laugh so hard that you choke!”

Harumi shouted out in anger while Koutarou continued to painfully laugh. Since this continued until the bus came, Koutarou's stiff shoulders didn't recover.

Tulip

Part 3

After separating with Harumi, Koutarou headed for home alone. His steps were light as he was in a good mood.

“Lately, Sakuraba-senpai has been overflowing with brightness, like she's coming out from her shell. It seems like having her take part in the play worked out…”

It was roughly a year ago that Koutarou and Harumi met during the recruitment at the result announcement. Back then, Harumi almost never showed how she felt. At best, he could see a smile every now and then during their club activities. However, this past year had changed Harumi. She came into contact with many people, and she had made friends in her class. Before then, her only friends were Koutarou and Yurika, so this was a big step forward.

“Theia, this is thanks to you.”

Theia's manuscript had served as a starting point for Harumi's change. Having been chosen as the heroine, she had been able to form a positive relationship with the people at the drama club. Acting wasn't possible alone, she needed to practice and work together with the other actors. And by standing on the stage, she managed to get some courage by being the center of attention. As a result, she managed to get the mental fortitude she required.

Koutarou felt like it was thanks to Theia that Harumi had been able to make such advancements.

“Well, Theia has changed as well…”

Theia was also different from before. The reason for her change was the need to cooperate for the sake of the play. Koutarou was convinced that the play had been positive for everyone involved.

“Oh?”

It was then that Koutarou spotted a familiar girl in the direction he was headed. That golden hair stood out even from afar. It was Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe. Since he was just thinking about her, Koutarou instinctively smiled.

“I see… so it was such a pretty flower…”

Theia was squatted down in front of a storefront by the road, staring at something. Koutarou wondered what was going on so he trotted towards her.

“Hey, Theia.”

And as he was right next to her, Koutarou lightly tapped Theia on the head.

“Hm?”

In the past, this alone would have been enough to enrage her and make her bring out her weapons. However, she was different now. She began by checking who it was, and when she saw that it was Koutarou, she smiled happily.

“Oh, Koutarou.”

“What are you doing here?”

Theia was staring into a small flower shop. Having entered the second half of March, the shop was filled with colorful spring flowers. Koutarou could understand that there was a flower in particular that she was interested in, but since there were so many, he decided to just ask her out right.

“Well, I came to look at the tulips.”

Tulip

Tulip. When she spoke that word, Theia touched her cheek and her smiled turned into a gentle one. She then looked back in the direction she had been staring at. In front of her were crimson tulips in full bloom.

“Tulip, huh… oh yeah, I used to call you that before.”

Just after their first meeting, Theia had her tucked up by Sanae's counter attack. Since her appearance back then was like that of a tulip, Koutarou had called her Tulip for a while. However, as time passed and his relationship with Theia changed, he gradually stopped using that nickname.

“However, as I thought about it, I realized I don't know much about the flower called tulip. So with that in mind, I came here.”

Theia had never seen a tulip. Back when she was being called Tulip herself, she could understand it was being used as an insult, so she didn't need to understand any more than that. Also, she didn't feel the need to look up a word being used to insult her.

By now, Theia had gotten curious as to what kind of flower a tulip was. She wanted to know what kind of flower it was since that's what the person she loved had called her.

“So, how is it?”

“I never imagined it would be such a pretty flower.”

Theia was staring at the flower behind the display window so closely that she was practically stuck to the window. The moment she spotted the flower she was left breathless by its beauty. The vivid crimson petals that formed the flowers were burned into Theia's heart.

“You've taken a liking to it?”

“Yes. It is a simple, yet dynamic and beautiful flower.”

The profile of Theia's face as she stared at the flower was incredibly gentle. Her appearance right now was a little different from the past. It was the feminine side to her that had been hiding on the inside.

Tulip

Tulip

Theia's a girl too…

As Koutarou was realizing something so obvious, Theia unexpectedly looked towards him.

“Koutarou, if you so wish, I will allow you to call me Tulip again.”

Theia smiled happily.

“Hey…”

However, Theia's offer puzzled Koutarou.

Tulip was the nickname he had used to make fun of Theia as her miserable appearance looked like the shape of a flower. It was neither respectful nor friendly as it was a nickname purely for the sake of making fun of her.

As time passed, Koutarou began feeling friendship and respect towards Theia, and his desire to make fun of her was practically gone. At worst, he felt that she was a little stubborn.

So if he were to call her Tulip again, it would only hold the meaning of a literal flower. Like calling Theia a pretty, vividly colored flower in full bloom.

Another problem was that Koutarou felt like Theia was now fit to be called by the name of a flower. Theia now had the dignity of a princess to make him feel that way. Theia was in no way inferior to a pretty flower.

With such complicated circumstances, Koutarou had a resistance towards calling her Tulip. He was a bit embarrassed because they were so close. If they were a bit more distant, he might actually have been able to call her Tulip.

“There's no need to call you by a nickname that has such a bad meaning anymore, is there?”

So Koutarou decided to try to evade the nickname. Calling her by the name of a flower right now, was too straightforward for him.

“However, I no longer have any resistance against that meaning.”

But Theia immediately shook her head. She didn't mind if she was called Tulip in a bad sense of the word.

“It is the truth that I was foolish, and being called that is part of my precious memories.”

If she was called Tulip in a bad way, she would have to work harder to become more suitable.

If it was in a good meaning, she could be proud while making an effort to bettering herself.

Either way would work as a guideline for Theia in the future. It was because of her trust for Koutarou that she didn't mind either way.

“…You sure are whimsical.”

“Yes, I am whimsical.”

Theia also had one more important reason.

She wanted a special bond just between her and Koutarou. Being called Tulip would be one such bond. It is always the wish of an anxious girl to be treated as special by the boy she loved, on any planet and in any age.

“Go on, try it.”

“Hearing you say that makes it harder…”

To Koutarou, calling Theia Tulip was almost the same as honestly telling her how he feels about her. It was a very tough situation for him.

Tulip

“…Tulip.”

After some hesitation, Koutarou finally spoke. And the moment she heard that word, Theia answered with a really happy expression.

“What is it, pleb?”

Pleb. It was what Theia had called Koutarou in the past, was spoken in contempt of the people on this undeveloped planet.

Theia…?

However, despite being the same word, it didn't sound like it held the same meaning. That was because it was just a big sign of her love, disguised as contempt. That's why Koutarou blankly stared at Theia's face in admiration.

“Fufu…”

Seeing Koutarou like that, Theia's smiled changed into a satisfied one.

“W-What do you mean by what, you're the one who told me to say it.”

As Koutarou suppressed the unrest inside of him, he answered in a purposefully blunt fashion.

Ever since she revealed her feelings during Valentine's Day, Theia would shake Koutarou's feelings from time to time. But Theia didn't ask for anything more than that. She understood that if Koutarou was to pick a lover, Kiriha would find herself in a crisis. That's why all she did was show her feelings from time to time. Apart from that, she was the same as always.

Don't get shaken up… Just stay the same… That's the best for everyone…

However, despite knowing all of that, Koutarou was having a hard time keeping his feelings in check. Compared to the Theia of now, dealing with Theia when he had first met her was much easier. Right now, he felt like his heart would be stolen away in an instant if he let his guard down.

“That's right.”

Theia showed a small smile, and tried to stand up after squatting in front of the tulip for such a long time. Koutarou reached out with his hand in reflex, and Theia grabbed it without any hesitation.

“Hey, pleb.”

Having stood up, Theia opened her mouth while still holding Koutarou's hand. She was staring straight into Koutarou's eyes.

“One day, I will become a splendid flower, royal, that you can boast about and embrace within your arms. So you keep pridefully advancing, just the way you are.”

Theia believed that Koutarou was a knight amongst knights. That's why, as long as she was a splendid royal, Koutarou would never part with her. Theia couldn't draw a clear line of her feelings of wanting to become a splendid royalty and her feelings for Koutarou. Those feelings merged into one and lit up her path.

“…I—”

“Your highness! Satomi-sama!”

Just as Koutarou was about to answer Theia, they could hear Ruth's voice in the distance.

“Ah…”

As a result, Koutarou's words were cut off.

Tulip

“You're here, Ruth! Come on, let's go, pleb!”

Theia showed a large smile and let go of Koutarou's hand and began running towards Ruth who had a smile just as large. Koutarou didn't follow after Theia right away, and instead he stood still and asked himself.

What was I about to say…?

Not even Koutarou knew what he was about to say to Theia, who had declared that she would become a splendid flower.

“Ruth.”

Theia who had run up to Ruth presented her hands to her.

“You may give me half the luggage.”

Ruth was on her way home from shopping. In her right hand was a shopping bag, and in her left hand was a plastic bag filled with what couldn't fit in the shopping bag.

While Ruth was standing in the line for the register, Theia had been using that time to look at the flowers here.

“Those feelings make me happy, but I can't let your highness carry luggage.”

“If I was just your master that might be true. But we made a promise the other day, that we would be together from now on.”

“…So we did. In that case, it might be heavy, but please take half of it.”

“Leave it to me. Besides, I'm stronger than you are.”

“Fufufu, that's true.”

At first, Ruth was resistant to letting her master carry the luggage, but in the the end she gave Theia the plastic bag. As she took the bag, Theia was in a good mood and she smiled as she checked its content. Seeing Theia like that, the answer seemed quite clear, but Ruth asked her anyways.

“By the way, your highness, were you able to see the tulips?”

“Yes! They were very pretty flowers!”

“That is good.”

Theia's response was just what Ruth had expected. But that was when she noticed something else. Based on Theia's smile, the fact that she had seen the flowers and that Koutarou was with her, she felt like something wonderful had happened to Theia. That was a happy event that made Ruth smile even more.

“They are lined up by the display window of that flower shop, so you should take a look too, Ruth.”

“Yes, I would lo—”

Then, just as Theia was about to return to the shop with Ruth in tow.

“That won't be necessary.”

As she heard Koutarou's voice, something large knocked against the back of Theia's head. It wasn't very hard, but it was at least as large as Theia's head.

“You fool.”

Tulip

Though Theia was criticizing Koutarou, when she turned, she didn't look to be in such a bad mood.

“Ah…”

But when she turned around, what she saw wasn't Koutarou, but a bouquet of tulips with the stalkers wrapped in white wrapping paper.

“Tulips…”

“Here.”

After Koutarou pushed the bouquet onto the puzzled Theia, he took her plastic bag. Theia didn't understand Koutarou's intentions and just stood still, holding the bouquet in both hands.

“Satomi-sama, could these tulips be a present for her highness?”

“Something like that.”

Koutarou scratched his head, embarrassed, while nodding at Ruth's question.

“May I… have them?”

“Yeah. I'm repaying you for the chocolate from Valentine's Day, or something like that.”

Koutarou had decided to repay everyone he had gotten chocolate from during Valentine's Day. But since Koutarou was inexperienced when it came to things like this, he had a hard time thinking of presents, and even though White Day had passed, he still hadn't repaid most people. Theia was one of those, but since she was looking at the tulips today, he decided to present her with flowers.

“I see… Well done, no, thank you, pleb.”

Having understood the situation, Theia smiled happily.

“Y-Yeah…”

Koutarou noticed that Theia's eyes were moist and that made him even more embarrassed as he quickly looked away.

“Isn't that great, your highness?”

“Yes… huh?”

Inside Theia's hand, the wrapping paper made a noise.

“There's another bouquet… pleb?”

Theia noticed that she was actually holding two bouquets. Confused, she looked to Koutarou for an answer. He was still looking away, but he quickly answered her question.

“I can't just give you flowers alone in this situation, can I?”

Koutarou had prepared this bouquet as a thanks for the Valentine's Day chocolate. And in that case, he couldn't just thank Theia alone.

“Apparently these are for you.”

Theia quickly realized who the second bouquet belonged to and presented it to that person.

“Oh my!”

The second bouquet had of course been prepared for Ruth.

The chocolate that Koutarou had gotten on Valentine's Day had been made by both Theia and Ruth. So two bouquets were required to repay them.

Tulip

“Isn't that great, Ruth?”

“Yes! Thank you very much, Satomi-sama!”

As Ruth received the bouquet, she held it against her chest, like a child that had been given a treasure. It was an unexpected present from the boy she had feelings for. And since Ruth hadn't expected to get a bouquet for herself, she was really happy. As large tears streamed down from her eyes, she repeatedly thanked Koutarou.

“Thank you, Satomi-sama! I will take great care of them!”

“Thank you, pleb. I am glad you didn't forget about Ruth.”

“Y-Yeah…”

With both Theia and Ruth being grateful towards him, Koutarou couldn't help but be embarrassed. He was inexperienced when it came to events like Valentine's Day and wasn't used to people thanking him directly.

“I'm going on ahead.”

“Satomi-sama?”

“What's wrong, pleb?”

That's why Koutarou took the luggage from Ruth as well and left the two behind as if he was trying to run away. He wanted to get away from them as quickly as possible so he could catch his breath.

“Fufufu… we were only thanking him. He should just boldly accept it…”

“But that's just what Satomi-sama is like.”

“Yes… that's true…”

With a tulip bouquet in hand, Theia and Ruth stared at Koutarou's back as he hurriedly left. After he vanished around a corner, Ruth looked down on the bouquet in her hand.

“…Your highness, are you aware of the meaning of the tulip in the flower language?”

Upon hearing Ruth speak, Theia also looked down at her bouquet. The crimson tulips were beautiful. Sadly, since Theia's pupils were so moist, she couldn't fully enjoy their beauty.

“No. I only just learned what the flower looks like. I have never looked up the flower language.”

Theia shook her head and tears streamed down her cheeks and spilled onto the tulips.

“The meaning of crimson tulips is true love.”

“…True… love…”

As Theia repeated the meaning, she instinctively looked towards Ruth. And since Ruth was looking back at her, the two stared at each other. After a light nod, Ruth continued speaking.

“But since it's Satomi-sama, he probably didn't do it consciously.”

Kenji might have been able to do so, but it was hard to imagine Koutarou presenting the two with tulips on purpose. He had only picked them because Theia seemed to have taken a liking to them. That's what the two believed.

“Even if he did chose them on purpose, it probably wasn't referring to the love between a man and a woman. But even then—”

“It is without a doubt true love, huh…”

Theia finished Ruth's sentence.

Tulip

She put a little force into her arms, and the bouquets wrapping paper rustled.

“Yes. That is what I think.”

Ruth affirmed Theia's words with a smile. That had been what she wanted to say.

“Seriously… what a difficult man…”

“…Master… thank you very much…”

Both Theia and Ruth knew that the flower language for these flowers being true love was just a coincidence. But they didn't doubt that this present had come from Koutarou's true love. They both felt that Koutarou really treasured them. They were a bit sad that it wasn't the romantic kind of love, but even then they were happy for his feelings.

Room 106 That Day

Part 1

March 16, Tuesday

Trying to preserve the beautiful flowers that Theia and Ruth had gotten from Koutarou, they passed straight through room 106 and headed onboard the Blue Knight. As a result, by the time Koutarou came home after taking a detour, the two were nowhere to be seen.

“What are you doing, Satomi-kun?”

“N-nothing much…”

Shizuka called out to Koutarou who was standing by the entrance peeking in. She had met him on the way and the two had gone home together. As of late, she had been spending more time in room 106 than in her own room. Even today she was coming into room 106 without going home first as well.

“You've been acting strange today, did you get into a fight?”

Shizuka who loved gossip leaned forward with her eyes sparkling.

“No, it's not like that, but…”

Koutarou smiled wryly and pushed back Shizuka.

“Oh? That's too bad.”

“Just what are you expecting?”

“A lovers’ quarrel.”

“Landlord-san…”

“Welcome back, Shizuka, Koutarou.”

Kiriha welcomed the disappointed Shizuka and the amazed Koutarou with a smile. She was wearing an apron and was in the middle of preparing dinner with chopsticks in her hands.

“I'm back, Kiriha-san.”

“I'm back.”

Shizuka entered first with Koutarou following her. It wasn't just Koutarou who had said that he was back, but Shizuka did as well, and nobody thought it was strange. She had already blended in with the rest in room 106.

“I'll help too, Kiriha-san.”

After removing her shoes by the entrance, Shizuka reached out to an apron hanging on the wall.

By the way, there were normally three aprons hanging on the wall in room 106. They were for Kiriha, Ruth and Shizuka.

And she of course reached out for her own apron. After quickly putting it on, she lined up by the sink next to Kiriha.

“All that's left is cutting up some vegetables.”

“Then I'll do that. Will you prepare the tea, Kiriha-san?”

“Very well.”

Shizuka washed her hands and began cutting vegetables in place of Kiriha. Thanks to Shizuka, Kiriha was able to ready a tray and put a tea set on it.

Room 106 That Day

She was better at preparing tea than Shizuka was. Shizuka hadn't just switched places with Kiriha because she wanted to help, but she also wanted to drink some delicious tea.

“Oh, so we're having nabe today?”

After finishing putting in what they had bought today into the fridge, Koutarou passed by the two. A big pot was standing on the stove, and Koutarou could immediately tell what was for dinner.

“It's still cold, but it's almost April. I figured we should have some nabe one last time.”

Kiriha stopped what she was doing and smiled. She then lifted the lid of the pot and showed the contents to Koutarou. The miso and Japanese stock created a fragrant smell, spreading throughout the kitchen. Today, it was a mushroom nabe.

“I see, that looks great.”

“Fufu, I'm happy to hear it.”

Kiriha returned the lid of the pot and smiled again. Those was her normal gestures, but her expression and eyes made Koutarou feel her deep love and gentleness.

“Koutarou, could you take the bag in the upper right shelf into the inner room?”

“Okay.”

Koutarou did as Kiriha said and pulled a bag out of the shelf. Inside the bag were rice crackers that Kiriha was planning on serving to go with the tea.

“I'll take this too.”

“Thank you, Koutarou.”

Koutarou took the tray out of Kiriha's hands and moved into the inner room. Kiriha followed after him, a few steps behind.

“Look out, Love Love Heart!”

“Run away! Hurry!”

In the inner room, Sanae and Yurika were glued to the TV. The two were so focused that they didn't even notice that Koutarou had come home. Koutarou found that adorable and decided not to call out to them as he wordlessly put the tray down on the tea table.

“I'll leave the rest to you, Kiriha-san.”

“Yes, just leave it to me.”

Making the tea was Kiriha's job. After moving out of the way for Kiriha, Koutarou pulled out a magazine that he had bought while he was shopping with Harumi from his bag and sat down next to Kiriha as she began preparing the tea.

“Here it comes! The combination attack of friendship!”

“Special Attack! Love Killer Heart Punisher!”

Koutarou had started out by casually reading his magazine, but he gradually began paying attention to Kiriha. It wasn't like there was any problem with her; in fact, it was quite the opposite, as he began paying more attention to her as there were no problems at all.

“Hey, Kiriha-san?”

“Hmm?”

Room 106 That Day

Koutarou closed his magazine and called out to Kiriha, to which in response she stopped preparing the tea. Since she was in the middle of draining the teapot of the tea leaves, she had time to spare. Koutarou continued after Kiriha turned to look at him.

“Why are you still the same?”

Koutarou couldn't help but be confused.

During Valentine's Day, Kiriha had learned that her first love was in fact Koutarou. But after that, Kiriha had remained the same. She didn't want to be doted on like Kii, nor did she ask him to become her lover. It was almost as if the events during Valentine's Day never happened.

That confused Koutarou. She had been searching so desperately for her first love, Koutarou, but now she showed no signs of it. He had his own problems since he found that Kii and Kiriha were the same person, but despite that, Koutarou couldn't imagine why there was seemingly no change to Kiriha.

“Fufu.”

Kiriha figured out the meaning behind Koutarou's question after thinking for a moment, and she smiled as she put her hand by her mouth. She then drew her mouth close to Koutarou's ear and whispered.

“…That's because if Kii comes out now, you would be troubled, right, Onii-chan? And that's the same for us.”

As Kiriha whispered that, she smiled like Kii. But after she finished whispering that, she separated from Koutarou and returned to her normal, mature, expression.

“The surface invasion is proceeding smoothly. While things are proceeding well, I have to hold down the opposition. So sadly, Kii doesn't have a turn for a while…”

“I see…”

From this short discussion, Koutarou understood what Kiriha meant.

Kiriha-san is prioritizing the People of the Earth over her own feelings…

In the end, Kiriha had the same idea as Theia.

“Besides, Koutarou, judging from your personality, if I was to act on my feelings, it would make you push me away, no?”

“That might be true.”

Kiriha understood Koutarou very well.

There was no way that Koutarou was going to choose a lover amongst the invaders until all of their problems had been resolved. The power balance of the room would change, and their judgement would be clouded by personal feelings. The serious Koutarou wanted to avoid all of that.

“That's why, as long as I act like normal, you will never push me away.”

And since Koutarou wouldn't choose, forcing the matter would only cause him to reject her. In other words, as long as she didn't force the matter, Kiriha could stay by Koutarou's side. That was the decision she had made.

This was the best option for her as it allowed her to continue her invasion while continuing to yearn for Koutarou.

“We will probably start after all our problems are resolved in the future.”

Room 106 That Day

Apart from Kiriha, there were others that also had feelings for Koutarou. And ignoring those feelings and taking actions by herself went against Kiriha's way of doing things. She wanted to wait until everyone had reached the starting line.

“Besides, you know how I feel for you. You will stay where I can reach you. I can see your happy smile, and feel your warmth nearby. What more could I ask of you now?”

For these past ten years, all Kiriha could do was project her feelings from a distance. But now, the person she felt for was right in front of her. They could laugh together and support each other. And that was enough for Kiriha for now.

“Even after everything has been resolved… I still might not choose you, you know?”

“That's true. There's a chance that might happen. However, I won't remain pessimistic.”

Kiriha also had one more reason to not rush her relationship with Koutarou.

Koutarou will most likely not choose anyone, even if all of our problems are resolved. A definitive piece is still missing…

Based on her experience up until now, Kiriha felt like something about Koutarou's approach towards women was lacking. Although she had no proof, since she had a spent a year together with him, she had noticed he had a wall around his heart.

Before she could understand why, pushing her feelings onto Koutarou would only trouble him. So before she did, she would need to find a method of circumventing the wall around his heart.

In other words, nobody possessed the means to become lovers with Koutarou right now. And since she knew that, she was not in a hurry.

“But that's—”

Kiriha's decision was too convenient for Koutarou. Of course, that was the same for Theia and Ruth as well. Regardless of how complicated the matters of room 106 was, even something as ignorant to love such as Koutarou knew that making the girls wait until he could make up his mind was bad.

That's why Koutarou tried to object.

“Stop.”

However, he was interrupted by Kiriha before he could.

“You might not know, but regardless of how low the chances of being together might be, I have a reason to wait for your decision. That's just how worthy of a man you are.”

Kiriha had no intention of stepping down.

Regardless of how low the chances of Koutarou choosing Kiriha was, since she loved him more than ten times the amount a normal person would, she would wait for him.

Kiriha couldn't imagine herself together with anyone but Koutarou. And she believed that Theia and Ruth felt the same way.

“That's just stupid.”

Kiriha would wait, even though Koutarou couldn't choose anyone because of his position. Koutarou would be happy if he could show some goodwill. But on the other side, making Kiriha wait was painful and he felt sorry that he couldn't choose her. Those complex feelings turned into blunt words and escaped from his lips.

“I know. But I am confident.”

Room 106 That Day

In contrast to Koutarou who was worried, Kiriha was full of confidence. She tapped her own chest and smiled at Koutarou.

“Let me tell you the words I told you when we met again in this place, on that day one year ago.”

On the other side of the clothes beneath Kiriha's hand, was an old metallic card. That card was the source of her willpower.

“Kii has waited underground for over ten years.”

“Ah…”

Koutarou's memory was revived.

A year ago, before they knew who of Onii-chan and Kii, Koutarou and Kii had met again in this room.

At that time, Kiriha had threatened Koutarou using almost the same words.

“Fufufu, it means we have waited for 1000 years. But how long will you endure? Half a year? A year? I'll do anything to make you nod your head.”

Kiriha was confident.

After all the problems had been resolved and Koutarou would be able to look at the invaders as women, she would use any means necessary to make Koutarou turn her way.

Together with the feelings and emotions that she had cultivated up until now and the love and bonds she would add onto in the future, she was certain that Koutarou couldn't reject Kiriha and Kii.

“Wahahaha! How foolish, Love Love Heart! There's no use resisting!”

Kiriha was convinced. She was overflowing with confidence, even more so than the villain on the TV, convinced that this warm something connecting Kiriha and Koutarou would bind them for all eternity.

Room 106 That Day

Part 2

As Kiriha had finished preparing the tea, Shizuka also finished preparing dinner while Sanae and Yurika finished watching their anime. They were now all gathered around the tea table.

“Ah, it's rice crackers today.”

“Let's eat!”

Sanae's eyes sparkled. Yurika suddenly grabbed a rice cracker and began eating it before she had even received her tea.

“Don't be so greedy, geez…”

“Yurika, wait!”

Koutarou stopped Yurika with strict words. She was just about to bite into the rice cracker and she glared at Koutarou as her mouth was wide open.

“Eeeeehhh~~~”

“Are you sure you should have such a defiant attitude, Yurika? I don't really care, but is that fine with you?”

“Woof.”

Yurika's body started to tremble from Koutarou's words as she returned the rice cracker.

Yurika had used a portion of her food budget for this week to buy a shoujo manga, so now she was dependent on Koutarou's help. Because of that, Koutarou's position was now far, far above Yurika.

“Good girl. Just stay quiet for a while.”

“Woof!”

Yurika stared at the rice cracker while sitting up straight as Kiriha was placing tea cups out on the table. By the way, there were two cups placed in front of Koutarou. One was his own, and the other was for Sanae when she clung onto his back.

“Paw.”

“Woof!”

“You may eat.”

“Woof Woof!”

Waiting for everyone to get their tea, Koutarou gave Yurika permission to eat her rice cracker. In response, Yurika swiftly grabbed a rice cracker and opened her mouth wide to begin eating.

As Yurika bit on the rice cracker, Koutarou disappointedly dropped his shoulders.

“…Can't you be a little bit more proper, Yurika.”

Lately, it had become Koutarou's job to improve Yurika's manners. He had negligent parts of his own, but he simply couldn't stay quiet as he looked at Yurika.

“You'll be a second year soon, you'll get juniors, you know?”

“Haff fooo hee?”

“Swallow the rice cracker before you speak.”

“Hokahy.”

Yurika picked up her cup and began drinking tea.

Room 106 That Day

“Hwoa!?”

However, as she did, her expression changed.

“Fhaaah! Hhot hhot hhot!”

Since the tea had just been poured, it was still piping hot. It burned her delicate esophagus as it passed down her throat. As a result, she spat out some of the tea and began struggling.

“H-Hey, it's tight enough here, quit kicking about, Yurika!”

“T-Thahts behcause hiths hhot!”

“Oh geez…”

Koutarou forcibly lifted Yurika and held her in his arms while he headed towards the kitchen. There, he made her drink water to cool down her body from the hot tea.

“Haaah~… I thought I was going to die~~~”

Having drunk the water, Yurika spoke in a carefree way.

“Yurika… why are you always like that?”

But Koutarou spoke in a sorrowful tone.

Yurika could keep it together in an emergency, but when it came to everyday life, she continued to fail wherever possible. Koutarou began to worry for her future. His instinctive preaching was a result of that worry.

“Even if you say that, that right now was Satomi-san's fault.”

“Why was it my fault?”

“It's because you rushed me to drink it. It was not my fault.”

“It was your fault!”

“Oh? Are you done carrying me? Let's return like this~”

“Walk there yourself!”

“Kyaaaa!?”

Koutarou returned to the inner room in a bad mood. Yurika followed behind him, with both of her hands pressing down on her forehead and her eyes tearing up.

“…Satomi-kun.”

“Yes?”

Waiting for Koutarou to sit back down, Shizuka began talking.

“Please continue to forever look after Yurika-chan.”

“Me!?”

“Yes. I don't think anyone else could manage her.”

“Forever!?”

“Yes. If you give up on her, she will probably drift down the wrong path.”

Shizuka was being serious. She had been observing Yurika all this time, and she had reached the conclusion that Yurika was in danger.

Yurika lived a sloppy lifestyle. Sometimes, Koutarou would end up brushing her hair because he couldn't stand it anymore. Yurika's lifestyle was only barely preserved thanks to the serious and

responsible Koutarou being by her side. The moment he gives up on Yurika, her life would surely turn awry. At the same time, Yurika's guard around the opposite sex was far too lax, and if it wasn't for Koutarou, Shizuka was worried that Yurika would be caught by some man with bad intentions.

“She's right. I have a right to live too.”

Yurika sat next to Koutarou and nodded.

She also knew that it would be bad if Koutarou was to give up on her.

“I don't want to hear that from you!”

“You're not being honest, Satomi-san~. In reality you love me~ geez~ you're so shy~”

“You bastard, do you want me to seriously hit you?”

“That won't happen. Satomi-san is gentle, so you would never hit—”

The sound of a fist crashing into someone's head rang out in room 106.

“…I-I would like to make amends. I'm so very sorry~”

“As long as you understand.”

“Yes Sir, may I eat a rice cracker?”

“I will allow it private.”

“Hah, I am honored.”

“Satomi-kun…”

Seeing Koutarou easily make Yurika obey him, Shizuka was convinced.

I definitely couldn't do that… I can only entrust Yurika-chan to Satomi-kun…

Shizuka knew that Yurika had stayed by Koutarou's side, regardless of who became his lover in the future, or something terrible would happen. So that those who worried about Yurika wouldn't lose their minds, Shizuka vowed to herself that she would convince the person that would become Koutarou's lover to agree.

Part 3

After that, time passed slowly. Since there was still time until dinner was ready, the residents drank tea and chatted, or read shoujo manga, or watched the news on the TV.

“Koutarou, what is that you're reading?”

Sanae hadn't had anything to do for a while, so she had been clinging onto Koutarou's back, but that alone was getting tedious so she peeked at what was in Koutarou's hands.

“It's this.”

“Monthly Professional Wrestling Magazine? So it's about professional wrestling?”

“Yup.”

Sanae used her spiritual energy to manipulate Koutarou's hand to flip the pages. And after gazing at the contents of the magazine, she stopped on a certain page.

“Koutarou, I wanna try this move.”

“The Scorpion Deathlock, huh?”

Sanae wanted to try out a certain wrestling hold.

The Scorpion Deathlock was performed by grabbing the legs of an opponent lying face down, and the bending your body. It was a relatively easy technique to pull off, even for an amateur, so it was an easy technique for Sanae, who knew next to nothing about professional wrestling, to try.

However, putting too much strength into this technique would cause the opponent to lose their breath, so it was important to be careful not to overdo it. But that wasn't a problem for Sanae. If the opponent was in pain, she could tell right away thanks to the change in their aura.

That was yet another reason why this technique would be a good choice for Sanae's first step into the wrestling world. Koutarou quickly agreed with her.

“Sounds fun. Let's try it.”

“Yes!”

When Koutarou agreed, Sanae happily gave him a big nod.

“Okay, Koutarou, lie down.”

“Okay.”

Sanae smiled as she pointed at the tatami. Koutarou followed her directions and laid down on top of it.

“Hehehe~”

Sanae straddled down around the area over Koutarou's waist and peeked at the wrestling magazine lying down on the tea table. She then moved her hands as she began thinking of how the technique was pulled off.

“Sanae-chan, if Satomi-kun has a hard time breathing you have to stop right away, okay?”

Shizuka was well versed in martial arts, so she decided to at the very least give Sanae a warning. She knew of the risks involved in this technique. It was a technique that would cause injuries from time to time.

“Aha, it'll be fine. I won't do it to the point where Koutarou will be in pain.”

Room 106 That Day

However, Sanae had no intention on hurting Koutarou. In fact, she was fine as long as she could stick to him.

As of late, there had been drastic changes in the relationships between Koutarou and the people around him. On the surface, almost nothing has changed, but by looking at their auras, Sanae could see big differences in Theia, Ruth and Kiriha. The auras they were emitting were always gently enveloping Koutarou. Sanae couldn't tell what had caused this change, but she imagined that Theia and the others had deepened their bonds with Koutarou. Sanae couldn’t help but feel envious of them.

She felt like she was being left out, and she felt lonely about it. That was why she wanted to get along with Koutarou just as much as the others did, why she wanted to attract Koutarou's attention by sticking to him during this playful wrestling session.

“Here I go, Koutarou!”

“Yeah, give it all you've got.”

“Ei!”

Sanae held Koutarou's leg and pulled, mimicking the magazine. As a result, Koutarou's body started looking like a scorpion's with his legs as its tail. But even then, Sanae took great care in managing her strength so that she didn't hurt Koutarou.

“How is it?”

“I can feel your back stretching and it feels great. But… I feel like it's a little different.”

Sanae had tried hard, but she was still a girl and an amateur. She didn't have a good grasp on the technique and her hold was weak. The reason for this was because Sanae was using her spiritual energy to pull off the technique. Since the effects were played out the way she recognized them, she had a hard time properly reproducing a technique she wasn't used to.

“You have to interlock the legs.”

“Like this?”

“No, not like that, like this.”

“How about this?”

“Hmm… you're a bit on the way there, but…”

Koutarou tried to tell Sanae how to pull off the technique, but it was hard to explain while he was under her hold.

“Sanae, let's stop for a moment.”

“Okay.”

So Koutarou asked her to undo her hold for a moment so he could properly explain. He believed that would be faster.

“Yurika, Yurika.”

Koutarou beckoned over Yurika who was nearby.

“Yef?”

Yurika stopped reading her shoujo manga and looked up. Since she was eating a rice cracker, her answer came out muffled.

“Could you lend me a hand for a moment?”

“Whaf ish iht?”

Room 106 That Day

Since Yurika had been focused on her shoujo manga, she hadn't noticed what Koutarou and Sanae were doing. She approached the two while still eating her rice cracker.

“Could you lie down on your stomach here?”

“Ish iht somehing pervehed!? Anf in front of Sanae-fan!?”

“Of course not.”

“Then itsh fhine… lihe thif?”

“Yeah, just like that. Thanks.”

“Haa…”

Yurika didn't really understand, but she followed Koutarou's directions. She stretched her body and laid flat, stomach down, on the tatami. There wasn't much she could do with her position like this, so she carefreely continued chewing on her rice cracker.

“Fuah!?”

That was when Yurika was struck with an acute sense of pain. The rice cracker spilled from her mouth because of it.

“W-What is–!?”

Yurika was completely unable to move. The joints in her legs were locked and wouldn't move, and with her legs raised up into the air, her upper body was pushed down, rendering her unable to move. Her arms were free, but despite her best efforts to swing them around, she couldn't escape.

“Ouch, owowowow! Satomi-san, help, it hurts!”

“Like this, Sanae.”

“I see. Like that.”

Yurika, who couldn't understand the situation she was in, instinctively called for Koutarou for help, despite him being the source of her pain. As a result, her pain wasn't alleviated in the slightest as she was used as a guinea pig for Koutarou and Sanae to try their technique on.

“Koutarou, I want to try too.”

“Before you do, you should hang onto me and get a feel for the technique.”

“I see. You're right! …Ei!”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“Sanae, hold back a little.”

“I see. Sorry Yurika.”

“…S-Satomi-shan… i-isn't this a little too much, j-just for skipping on cleaning up the bathroom?”

“Actually, Sanae, you don't have to hold back.”

“Got it.”

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Sanae was a diligent student, but because of that, it took a while before Yurika was freed from her hell.

After Sanae had properly mastered the Scorpion Deathlock, she began massaging Koutarou's body because she had recalled saying that it felt great feeling his back being stretched when she was trying the hold on him.

Room 106 That Day

“Koutarou, you can't just leave it be until it gets this bad. Your circulation has gotten worse.”

“I got it. I'll let you know the next time I notice.”

“Good, just leave it to this Sanae-chan!”

Sanae massaged Koutarou like she always did. Using her poltergeist, she roughly massaged his muscles while using her spiritual energy to improve the circulation of his spiritual energy.

While Koutarou was receiving a massage, there was someone lying down next to him.

“This… is just too cruel…”

That person was Yurika, who had served as Sanae's training partner. With tears in her eyes, she looked at Koutarou who was right next to her. She had been complaining to him like this for a while now.

“If I knew this would have happened, I would have preferred having something perverted done to me…”

Having had her joints attacked, she was unable to move anything at chest level and below. All she could do was complain to Koutarou.

“I'm sorry, Yurika. We overdid it a little.”

Koutarou was reflecting on his actions. His athletic blood ran wild and he accidentally went too far. Since he had no intentions of hurting Yurika, he honestly apologized.

“If you're going to apologize then please don't do it to begin with!”

But that alone wasn't enough to satisfy Yurika as she continued to complain. Now, opposite of before, Yurika's position was far above Koutarou's.

“That's because you're the only one I can ask.”

The moment Koutarou said “you're the only one,” Sanae's hands unconsciously twitched. However, nobody noticed that minute change. Not Koutarou, and not even Sanae noticed it.

“You didn't ask! You just did it all of a sudden!”

“Really?”

“Yes, really! And why is it me!? There were many more you could have asked!”

Yurika moved her arms and pointed at the girls in the room.

In the room were Kiriha and Shizuka, along with Theia and Ruth who had just returned.

When Yurika was put under the Scorpion Deathlock, Theia and Ruth were somewhere else, but both Theia who he often got into fist fights with and Ruth who underwent combat training together with him would be good fits for the job. So adding in Yurika, Koutarou should have had five choices. And amongst them, he had chosen Yurika. She wanted to know the reason for that.

“That's because, everyone else are girls, you know?”

That was Koutarou's answer after he looked at all of the girls in order.

They were all girls of age, so he was reluctant to go out of his way to ask them to be guinea pigs.

And in particular, Theia, Ruth and Kiriha had shown clear affection towards him. He couldn't easily use wrestling techniques on them. Because for better or worse, the atmosphere would become an uncomfortable one.

“I'm a girl too!”

Room 106 That Day

Yurika was not happy, because it was as if Koutarou was saying that she wasn't a girl. And reacting to Yurika's words, the other girls began intervening.

“Well… if it's Satomi-kun… he wouldn't touch me inappropriately.”

“We wouldn't really mind, right Ruth?”

“Yes. Her highness and I are always doing similar things with Satomi-sama.”

“I don't mind either. Earning a favor wouldn't be bad.”

Shizuka trusted Koutarou based on how he behaved, and she loved martial arts.

And the other three had no reason to turn him down. If anything, they'd prefer to actively help.

It was because the four of them were so positive about it that Koutarou couldn't ask them, but those feelings didn't reach Yurika.

“See, that's what everyone is saying! So why did you pick me!?”

“That's because you're… how do I put it?”

It was because he couldn't chose the other four that Koutarou had ended up choosing Yurika. But like she said herself, she was also a girl. So there should be a reason for why he had chosen her specifically.

“I demand a detailed explanation!”

“That's because, you're… uh…”

However, Koutarou couldn't think of a reason.

On the surface, she did look like a useless girl, but Koutarou knew that she could be trusted in an emergency. She had been reliable when Maki had gone missing in the snowy mountains. That's why he thought she treasured her friends and worked hard for them.

And from what Koutarou could tell, Yurika had become able to freely use Encyclopedia's magic. As expected, she was serious about magic and she was learning fast. As a result, in terms of Yurika's power, she was starting to catch up to Theia and Kiriha. Right now, she was far from incapable.

On top of that, as Harumi's friend, Yurika had been a great help. She would give advice and go out to play with her. Harumi would always smile when she mentioned Yurika. There was no doubt that Harumi really treasured Yurika.

Knowing that, Koutarou most definitely cared about Yurika. If he hadn't, he wouldn't look after her.

So Koutarou did properly see Yurika as a girl, and he shouldn't really be able to use wrestling techniques on her because he felt like it. Despite that, he had chosen her. As Koutarou thought of this, he realized that not even he understood why.

“…What are you?”

“Please don't ask meee!”

He couldn't reach a conclusion, but Koutarou did indeed think that he could ask Yurika. That's why he began realizing that the girl called Yurika, was apparently a special existence for him.

I wonder what this means…?

Koutarou tilted his head. But he couldn't understand his own intentions, and the solution to it wouldn't appear for a while longer.

Room 106 That Day

Part 4

“Satomi-san is fundamentally lacking in love towards me!”

“That's not true. That's why I was thinking of making your meal today free.”

“Really!? I knew you were a good person from the day we met! That's right~, Satomi-san absolutely loves me after all~”

“So help me out with some more wrestling techniques.”

“That's fine~… wait, no, I absolutely refuse!”

Listening to the angry Yurika and to Koutarou apologizing to her, Theia whispered to herself as she opened the box for today's board game.

“In the end, Koutarou might be the most open with Yurika…”

Her whisper was silent, but it reached the ears of Kiriha who was sitting next her. After taking a sip of her tea that was starting to cool, Kiriha whispered back to her.

“That might be true. Compared to us, his guard around Yurika is surprisingly low.”

Ruth, who was also sitting next to Theia, followed up on Kiriha's words.

“Satomi-sama only ever asks anything of Yurika-sama after all.”

Kiriha and Ruth had noticed the same thing Theia had.

Koutarou was incredibly kind to those he got along with. But that was a one-sided affair, as he never asked for anything himself, apart from simple requests like taking out the trash and the likes. But he had never made any major request. And as far as Theia and Kiriha could tell, the only exception to that was Yurika. She was the only one that Koutarou would ask about something major.

Asking her to be a guinea pig for today's wrestling techniques was just one such example. During their school trip, he had asked her to go skiing with him. And before that, the two had stayed up all night writing manuscripts for a play. There were also many more such examples. Whenever Koutarou made a request like that, Yurika would always be the one he would asked.

“…I'd like to know why…”

Kiriha showed a small smile as she gazed at Koutarou and Yurika, who were still quarreling while lying down on the floor.

Though she wasn't aware of it, Yurika was breaking through the wall around Koutarou's heart. That's why only she was in a special position. Though she still had a bit to go before she completely broke through the wall, Kiriha wanted to know how she was doing it, as it was a wall she had to break through one day as well.

It was at that time that Sanae, who was massaging Koutarou, stopped.

“…Now that I think about it…”

Sanae had heard what Kiriha and the others were whispering about. Since she heard spiritual waves better than she could hear sound waves, as long as a voice had strong feelings behind it, she could hear it even if it was a whisper.

Koutarou has never asks me for anything…

It wasn't until she had heard Kiriha and the others whispering that she first realized that she had only ever relied on Koutarou. Even the massage she was doing right now was something she had asked Koutarou herself. When she thought back on it, that had been the case ever since

they met. Koutarou had never asked her for anything important. Even if Koutarou accepted Sanae, he never needed her.

But… Yurika is different… Why…?

When Koutarou used a wrestling technique on Yurika, he was able to naturally do so without any hesitation. And that pointed to a single answer: Koutarou needed Yurika.

I…

Sanae's spiritual energy unconsciously flared up as a result of her wanting to have a stronger bond with Koutarou. If someone that was able to see spiritual energy had been around, they would be able to see that Sanae's spiritual energy wasn't just filling up room 106, but the entirety of Corona House. That was just how deeply, strongly and purely Sanae felt for Koutarou.

“However, Koutarou respects me the most.”

“You sound quite confident, alien princess.”

In contrast to Sanae who was feeling anxious, Theia remained confident. While she pulled out the game board from the box, she smiled as if it was nothing.

“But of course. I am a prideful princess of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire. As long as I am the noblest royal, the strongest knight will obey me.”

Theia no longer felt envious about the positives of others. She was going to make Koutarou turn her way with her own good sides. Theia was going to break through the wall around Koutarou's heart using a different method than Yurika’s.

“That makes sense.”

Kiriha honestly felt like Theia was amazing. She also began thinking that she should do the same. She shouldn't be mimicking what Yurika and Theia are doing, but she should make Koutarou turn her way in the way Kiriha and Kii would.

I might have fallen behind on the start…

Kiriha showed a small bitter smile. While Yurika wasn't aware of it, she was gradually breaking through Koutarou's wall. And Theia was challenging the wall by her own will. At the present, one could say that the two were ahead of her. Kiriha was confident that she could make Koutarou turn to her, but her start had been delayed.

“What is everyone talking about?”

That was when Shizuka returned with a tray in her hand. She had headed to the kitchen to prepare some more tea.

“We were just talking how Koutarou and Yurika were getting along so well.”

“It really does look like it. Just the other day, Mackenzie was wondering if the two of them were going out.”

Shizuka loved this kind of gossiping. That was why Theia and Kiriha's discussion stopped here.

“Koutarou, Sanae, Yurika; since we've gotten more tea, why don't we play one game before dinner?”

Theia called for Koutarou and the others as she spread out the game board on top of the table. At the same time, she laughed with self-ridicule in her mind.

Does this game even have any more meaning apart from entertainment?

Room 106 That Day

In the past, Theia had planned to seize control of room 106 through games. But now, the games no longer had any more meaning apart from just being games. Frankly put, Theia no longer cared if she lost all of her points.

It was important for Theia to not show an unsightly side as a princess of Forthorthe, but she realized that it wasn't important for her to win. And she believed that Koutarou would follow her because of that.

Because of that, Theia's victory itself wasn't important to clear her trial. She had started thinking that it would be ideal if Koutarou won it for her.

That said, Theia wasn't going to back down from a fight. And thinking of Kiriha's circumstances, it wasn't a good idea to throw the game. Because of that, the games continued; it was another way of life for a princess.

“Yeah. Got it. Let's go, Sanae, Yurika.”

“Okay…”

“Satomi-san, please help me up. I can't move yet.”

“What can I do with you…”

“This is your fault, Satomi-san.”

“I know, I know.”

Without a clue of the complex feelings the girls were having, Koutarou carefreely carried Yurika to the tea table.

“Can you sit?”

“I want to lean against the wall.”

“Can you reach from there?”

“You can move the pawns, Satomi-san.”

“Guess it can't be helped…”

Koutarou sat Yurika down by a nearby wall and crawled straight towards the tea table so he would be near her.

“Alright—”

Let's start.

As Koutarou was about to say those words, his view turned dark and he lost his sense of balance.

What!?

He was overcome with a sudden case of vertigo as he was crawling. Having lost his balance, he fell and laid down on the tatami mat.

“Koutarou!?”

“What's wrong!?”

“Satomi-san!?”

The girls shouted out in surprise as Koutarou suddenly fell down. But fortunately, Koutarou was quickly able to recover.

“Mast—Ah… no, Satomi-sama, are you okay?”

Ruth reached out to Koutarou who had collapsed in front of her. Koutarou grabbed her hand and got up.

Room 106 That Day

“Thank you, Ruth-san. I probably only got a little dizzy. It's not a big deal.”

Koutarou smiled at the girls who worried for him.

In truth, his eyes were still spinning a little, but he felt himself recovering. That's why he felt that the girls worrying for him was a bit exaggerated.

“…Koutarou, does that happen a lot?”

Kiriha was especially worried and she looked at him with a very serious gaze.

“It's been a long time since I was last dizzy. I think it's because I was lying down for so long.”

Koutarou himself wasn't particularly worried. He had been lying down since the Scorpion Deathlock and his massage, so he was certain that he had just gotten a little dizzy from getting up too fast.

“You don't have to be so worried.”

“I see… Well, if you say so…”

Despite Koutarou's smile, Kiriha's gaze was still serious, as she thought what might have happened. Koutarou thought that was strange, but since Kiriha had a legitimate reason to worry for his body, he decided not to question it any further.

“Don't scare us like that, Satomi-kun.”

“It seems like you're not trained well enough. We'll have to retrain you.”

“You might have an iron deficiency. Let's have liver or something similar tomorrow.”

“I don't really like liver. But since it would be a waste, I'll still eat.”

“Koutarou, I'll massage you again later.”

Seeing Koutarou acting fine, everyone seemed to ease up. And even Sanae who had shown a complex expression smiled again.

“I'm sorry for scaring you. Now let's start the game. Dinner's waiting after all.”

Like that, Koutarou and the others began playing their game like normal.

They no longer looked like invaders fighting for territory, but like children that had gathered in a house to play.

Sanae's Crisis

Part 1

March 16, Tuesday

Today's game was held three times, with them having dinner in between. The total result of the three rounds ended with Yurika and Theia in the lead, Koutarou and Kiriha behind them and Sanae in last place.

With these results, Kiriha lost her lead and Theia took first place. Koutarou defended his position as third, and Yurika barely managed to pass Sanae and escape from last place.

However, the average between Koutarou and Sanae's point total exceeded Yurika's. Sanae was in last place because she had given Koutarou points before. Koutarou would eventually return the points to Sanae, so in reality, Yurika was still in last place.

“Oh, Ooooh, I'm finally no longer in last place!”

“Good for you, Yurika.”

Sanae, who was now in last place, congratulated Yurika. That action revealed the current state of room 106, as nobody thought it was wrong. They felt like things had gotten strange, but at the same time, they felt that was okay.

“Thank you very much, Sanae-chaaan!”

Yurika grabbed Sanae's hand and shook it up and down. Yurika, who was originally scared of ghosts, seemed to have forgotten that as she would often touch Sanae. The two got along quite well.

“Koutarou, now I'm in last place!”

After praising Yurika, Sanae flew towards Koutarou and presented her head to him.

“So why don't you cheer me up.”

“That's too bad.”

Koutarou patted Sanae's head and comforted her. Sanae smiled happily, and everyone who saw that expression suspected that she had gotten last place just because she wanted him to do that.

“You have to pour more love into it.”

“Oh, my always adorable lady Sanae, I sympathize with your feelings. Please allow this Koutarou to do anything in my power to cheer up my lady.”

Since this was a common occurrence, Koutarou was already used to it. He continued patting her head while speaking the words she wanted to hear. Since she was a ghost, she preferred it when their auras came into contact. Koutarou was well aware that Sanae wanted to be patted on the head.

“Nn, very well.”

Satisfied with her head patting, Sanae mimicked Theia and nodded.

“Your words are wasted on me.”

“Fufufu~”

Smiling, Sanae moved to Koutarou's back. Since Koutarou had homework to do, he couldn't just keep patting her. So until he was done with his homework, she was going to cling to his back like always.

Sanae's Crisis

“Then let's study, Koutarou.”

“Yeah. Yurika, it's time for our homework, that's enough manga for now.”

“Eeeeehh~~~!? Can't I just read a little more!?”

“You've never settled for a little.”

“You're not being trusted, Yurika.”

“I can start once you've finished all of your homework, Satomi-san.”

“I see, you're planning on copying my work, you bastard!”

“When I copy your homework there are errors here and there which makes it more believable!”

“This is hopeless…”

Sanae laughed as she poured more strengths into her arms around Koutarou's neck.

It wouldn't be too bad if life just stayed like this…

At some time, the girl who had been waiting for her parents’ return began feeling that way. Her wanting to meet her parents still hadn't changed, but she now loved her current lifestyle just as much. What she loved the most was of course the warmth that was in her arms. As long as she could feel this warmth, she could endure the loneliness of not seeing her parents.

But… I can't become a real part of the family…

Sanae focused on what was in her right hand. In it, she was holding a 'Family Safety' charm. This charm was protecting her. It was the proof that Koutarou treasured Sanae. However, Sanae was feeling dissatisfied that Koutarou was always protecting her. Just like how the charm protected her, she also wanted to protect Koutarou. But only a flesh and blood human could do that. 'Family Safety' was a charm to protect the family. As a ghost, Sanae couldn't become Koutarou's family, or even give birth to children. She was in a position where she was being protected while being unable to protect herself, and was unable to proceed ahead.

The only way for a ghost like Sanae to become a real part of Koutarou's family would be to enter Nirvana and be reborn. However, Sanae didn't choose to do that. She didn't want to leave Koutarou's side. She wanted to forever embrace this warmth, and be embraced by it. In that dead end, Sanae was unable to move any further on ahead.

However, a situation that would shake the very foundation of that dead end suddenly appeared.

“Kyaa!?”

Along with a jarring sound similar to a light bulb shorting out, Sanae's arms passed through Koutarou's body.

Though Sanae didn't have a body to begin with, if she focused, she could grab onto a person's aura. She was supposed to have been doing that now as well, but her arms had passed through Koutarou.

“W-What is going on!?”

When the surprised Sanae looked at her arms, she saw that their former firm shape had changed as they now looked like they were dripping as their outline blurred. And from time to time. they would completely disappear. And what was even worse that it wasn't just her arms. Her entire body's outline was blurring, just like her arms.

“What's wrong!?”

Hearing Sanae's scream, Koutarou had a bad feeling as he hurriedly turned around. There, he saw Sanae, whose outline was gradually weakening.

Sanae's Crisis

“Koutarou!”

“What!?”

Koutarou had never seen Sanae like this. When she would hide her appearance, she would do so more clearly. Not in this fragmented fashion. And she also had no reason to do so now.

“What's with that appearance!?”

Koutarou was surprised by Sanae's strange appearance and wanted an explanation, but Sanae herself could only shake her head.

“I don't know either! What is this… this has never happened before!”

This was a first for Sanae as well, which was why Sanae was overcome with fear. She didn't know what was going to happen, and while Sanae was overcome by an unknown fear, she simply stood still with a blank stare.

“Sanae-chan!?”

“Ruth, what is happening to Sanae!?”

“I don't know! The circumstances regarding Sanae-sama's body is outside of our knowledge!”

All Shizuka, Theia and Ruth could do was be surprised. They didn't understand anything about ghosts. They could tell that some kind of problem had occurred, but they couldn't take any actions to help.

“Just what is—That's right!”

However, Koutarou was barely able to take action. Even if something had occurred to Sanae herself, the routes for spiritual energy that Sanae had created still existed. Koutarou used his ability to see spiritual energy and try to understand what was happening to Sanae.

“This is!?”

However, when he did, he was even more surprised.

When he had looked at her with that power before, Sanae's body had been shining with a dazzling light. However, that wasn't the case now. The shine had greatly weakened, and was now less than half of what it had been before.

Sanae had been shining because a portion of her enormous spiritual energy had leaked outside of her body. This is what was called a Aureola in Buddhism or an Angel's Halo in Christianity. And if that shine was greatly diminishing, it meant that the spiritual energy that made up Sanae's body was diminishing as well. Because her spiritual energy was growing weaker, the spiritual energy she was leaking lessened and weakened the light.

And this light wasn't just half as strong, it would also irregularly spike. It was proof that Sanae's body was growing more and more unstable.

Koutarou could understand what was going on with Sanae, but this was as far as he could go. He couldn't do anything about this.

“Koutarou what's her situation!?”

Only Kiriha was able to do anything about this.

“Sanae's spiritual energy has been cut in half! And it's strangely unstable!”

“Karama, Korama!”

After hearing about Sanae's situation from Koutarou, Kiriha quickly called for her two haniwas.

“Yes Ho-!”

Sanae's Crisis

“Sanae-chan, we'll save you right now Ho-!”

The two haniwas were usually lurking nearby, hiding their appearance. By the time Koutarou and the others could see them, they were already floating in the air, facing Sanae.

“Karama, the spiritual energy stabilizer! Expand the area, activate at class II! Prioritize on stabilizing the control!”

“Understood! Activating spiritual energy stabilizer! Operating mode at class II, expanding area! Nee-san, a warning Ho-! With my spiritual energy batteries, I can only operate class II for 238 seconds Ho-!”

“I know! Korama!”

“Yes Ho-!”

“Connect your spiritual energy battery to Karama! Send all the energy apart from what you need for basic control to Karama!”

“Should output be emulated after Sanae-chan's aura Ho-!?”

“That's right, the analysis should be done!”

“Understood Ho-!”

Kiriha ordered her haniwas to try to restore Sanae to normal. She was planning on using Karama to stabilize Sanae's unstable spiritual energy, while using Korama's spiritual energy battery to replenish Sanae's spiritual energy. Simply explained, it was like patching up a hole that had opened up in a balloon and re-inflating it.

All that's left is…!

Without waiting for her haniwas to start, Kiriha took her next action. She pulled out a cellphone from her pocket; she was going to contact someone. But before she could dial the number, her cell phone began vibrating. The person she was going to call had contacted her first.

“It's Kiriha!”

Kiriha quickly pressed the call button and held the cellphone against her ear.

“Nee-san! Kiriha-Nee-san! It's me! Hachi!”

The voice coming from the cellphone was one of the ghost hunters that had kidnapped Sanae on the beach last year.

After Koutarou and the others had retaken Sanae from them, Kiriha had bought information about Sanae from them. And by extension, they were now working as her subordinates.

“I am aware of the abnormality! What information do you have!?”

“Bad news! That girl, Sanae-chan is dying!”

“What about the spiritual energy stabilization device!?”

“Aniki just left to set it up!”

“I'll leave that to you! But don't hang up the call!”

“Roger that!”

Having learned what she needed, Kiriha's already serious expression turned even more severe.

I can only pray we make it in time…

Sanae's Crisis

If the device that Kiriha had given to the ghost hunters in advance activated properly, Sanae should temporarily be able to recover. But the question was if she could buy the time necessary for the machine to be set up with her haniwas.

“Nee-san, the spiritual energy stabilizer’s output is stable Ho-! The operating limit is in 230 seconds! Continuing the countdown Ho-!”

As Karama said that, Sanae's body regained its clear shape. The yellow light emitted from Karama was stabilizing Sanae's body.

“I have connected the battery to Sanae-chan's aura through Karama's spiritual energy stabilizer Ho-! The converter is currently stable, we should be fine for a while now Ho-!”

The light emitted from Sanae grew a little stronger. It was weaker than normal, but it was no longer unstable and the light shone at a constant quantity.

Simply put, Sanae had recovered a bit, but Kiriha's expression was still serious.

“Only 230 seconds… we might not make it…”

Kiriha calculated the time necessary for the ghost hunters to activate the device. When she subtracted the time she could buy with Korama and Karama, she came up with a ten second something deficit. Which meant that Sanae would have to endure that remaining time in her previously unstable form. It was a dangerous bet that Kiriha would have preferred to avoid.

“Kiriha-san, just what is going on!?”

Koutarou figured that Kiriha had been able to act based on some kind of information she held, and he wanted an explanation from her. Since Koutarou could see that Sanae had been vanishing, he couldn't keep quiet.

“Sanae's spiritual energy supply has decreased and she is starting to disappear.”

Kiriha bit her lip.

She had made preparations to keep this from happening, but the situation had changed faster than she had imagined.

“Disappear!?”

Koutarou's bad premonition turned out to be accurate and his expression was greatly distorted.

“What do you mean by disappear!? As in die!?”

Hearing that she was disappearing, Sanae ran up to Kiriha with a bitter expression. Since she had just had a scary experience, Kiriha's words sounded convincing. Sanae realized her own crisis and trembled in fear.

“Sadly, that's precisely what it means. There is insufficient spiritual energy to stabilize your body. If left like this, you will dissolve and assimilate with nature's spiritual energy.”

A ghost was an existence that used some kind of power to gather spiritual energy to a single point. If that power was to disappear, they would become an unbound mass of spiritual energy and would surely scatter after a short while. The same way air does when a balloon bursts. It would diffuse in the surrounding air until it becomes indistinguishable.

“No, I don't want to disappear!”

Having realized the situation she was in, Sanae was overcome by an even greater fear than before. Her hair was disheveled and tears filled her eyes.

“Sanae-chan, stay calm Ho-!”

“If you move or if your feelings get out of control, you'll use up more spiritual energy Ho-!”

Sanae's Crisis

Every time Sanae moved, the two haniwas followed as they were what was keeping her body stabile.

“Even if you say that, I can't sit still after hearing that I'm going to disappear! What do I do, Koutarou!?”

Scared, Sanae jumped at Koutarou. Fortunately, since the haniwas were stabilizing her body, Koutarou was able to hold Sanae.

Sanae…

Sanae was trembling in Koutarou's arms. And in order to stop that, he strongly embraced her.

“Kiriha-san, isn't there some way!? She can't just suddenly disappear!”

Sanae's crisis wasn't Kiriha's fault. But even though he knew that, Koutarou pressed her for an answer. That's just how worried he was for Sanae.

“There are some people moving to stop it. All we can do is bet on them.”

Kiriha showed Koutarou her cellphone. With that, he was able to understand that the person that she had talked with before was working to solve the situation.

“But there might not be enough time. I can't say with 100% certainty that she will be saved.”

“Koutarou!”

Not enough time. Hearing that, Sanae held onto Koutarou even harder.

No, I don't want to separate with Koutarou! Anything but that!

Sanae's internal scream turned into force that she poured into her arms to embrace Koutarou even stronger.

This is so warm! I am happy here! So, so…!

And she grasped her right hand even harder. Inside of it was a charm with the words 'Family Safety' embroidered into it.

“Hold me, Koutarou! So I won't disappear!”

That was Sanae's only wish.

To be together with Koutarou.

A year after meeting him, Koutarou had become an irreplaceable existence to Sanae, even though in the past he had been an enemy that she had wanted to chase out no matter what.

Sanae could no longer imagine life without Koutarou. When she woke up in the morning, she would see his carefree sleeping face. If she didn't, she didn't know who she would say good morning to.

“By not enough time, how much specifically!?”

Koutarou poured more into his arms as well. Though since it was an emergency, it might not have been in response to Sanae's voice. But Koutarou definitely didn't want to lose Sanae. So by chance, he realized Sanae's wish. But that wasn't just pure coincidence. It was an inevitable coincidence thanks to their overlapping feelings.

Koutarou… Koutarou…

Sanae entrusted herself to Koutarou. If she was going to disappear, she would rather melt into Koutarou and become one.

“One or two minutes… no, it shouldn't take two minutes.”

Sanae's Crisis

“Less than two minutes…”

Hearing that, Koutarou lightly grasped his right hand and brought it to his face.

“…Master…”

Just seeing that movement, Ruth could tell what Koutarou was about to do.

Koutarou was going to use the bracelet on his right wrist to call forth Signaltin in order to buy enough time for Sanae.

I have to hurry and take her highness away from here…

Koutarou shouldn't want to show Theia Signaltin. But if Sanae was in danger, he wouldn't hesitate to bring Signaltin out. In that case, the best solution would be for Ruth to take Theia somewhere else.

“Your highness, let us do what we can as well.”

“Ruth?”

“Let us return to the Blue Knight and bring with us devices to stabilize space.”

These words were mostly to take Theia away from there, but in the case that Signaltin wouldn't work, she also wanted to prepare as much as possible. Ruth was also worried for Sanae.

“Very well!”

Theia quickly decided. Sanae was a precious friend to her as well. And at the same time, she was also a rival competing for rulership over room 106, so she was someone she had to defeat fair and square. A royal's battle couldn't be decided by the other party dying from sickness or accident.

“Let us hurry back to the Blue Knight!”

Theia moved towards the wall furthest into room 106 so she could use the teleportation device that had been set up there to return to her ship.

“Yes, your highness!”

Ruth nodded and signaled Koutarou with a glance.

I will leave the rest to you, Master…

Seeing Koutarou respond with a nod, Ruth chased after Theia. But there was someone that stopped them.

“Please wait!”

When that voice rang out in room 106, everyone's eyes opened wide. It was Yurika, who had been silently watching until now.

“What is the meaning of this, Yurika! We are in a hurry!”

Theia who had been stopped was angry. There was less than four minutes left. Theia had to return to the Blue Knight quickly as possible.

“I'll hear what you have to say later!”

“Ah, p-please wait! Listen to—”

“I don't have the time!”

Theia rejected Yurika and headed for the Blue Knight.

“Wait, Tulip!”

However, that was when Koutarou stopped Theia as well.

“P-Pleb!?”

Because Koutarou had called her Tulip, Theia instinctively turned around as she was standing on the doorway to the Blue Knight.

“Believe in her!”

Koutarou shouted to Theia with determination.

“Ah, okay…”

Those few words were enough to stop Theia.

There should have been a reason for him to call her Tulip. Hearing his determined voice made her stop as she could feel how serious Koutarou was.

“Speak, Yurika, what do you want to do!?”

Koutarou was convinced that he could believe in Yurika. Her eyes right now were the same as when Maki had gone missing on the snowy mountain.

“Satomi-san…”

Yurika was surprised. Normally Koutarou wouldn't believe her and treat her poorly. She couldn't believe that he was siding with her now.

But, this…

Yurika had seen Koutarou's earnest glance before. They were the same as when Maki had vanished on the snowy mountain. The same glance he had shown when Yurika had tried to chase after Maki alone, but Koutarou had offered to help.

I don't really understand, but Satomi-san believes in me!

Yurika didn't even notice that she was different from normal. She wasn't aware of her own growth. But even then, she could clearly feel that Koutarou believed in her.

That's why Yurika could confidently declare it.

Someone believed and put hope in her.

And that feeling awakened the courage and confidence sleeping within Yurika.

“Magic! I will use magic to buy those two minutes!”

Yurika clearly stated.

Surely everyone in room 106 would admit that the Yurika in front of them right now was without a doubt a magical girl.

Part 2

In a way, Yurika's suggestion was the same as what Kiriha was doing. She would stabilize Sanae's body from the outside while supplying her with energy at the same time. The only difference was that it would be done using magic.

“So, what can we do to help, Yurika!?”

“Please stand in a circle around Sanae-chan!”

Wearing her magical girl outfit, Yurika held her large cane and pointed its tip at Sanae. She was currently holding Encyclopedia. The cane she had been using before, Angel Halo, had fused with her clothes in her battle against Maki, and had now turned into a series of decorations including the wings on her back.

“I will then transfer everyone's spiritual energy to Sanae-chan.”

“Is something like that possible!?”

“I have never tried, but it should be!”

Yurika's idea was to activate her magic, at the same time the haniwas run out of power, to maintain Sanae's body for two minutes. Since maintaining Sanae's body required energy, the other six people in the room would supply that energy. Yurika would use Encyclopedia to stabilize Sanae's body while using her own spell to supply Sanae with spiritual energy. This was a bold move Yurika could do because she had gotten another cane.

But because it was such a bold move, it was also a complex spell that required minute control. It would take longer than normal to activate, and she had stopped Theia and Ruth because she wouldn't have enough time otherwise. If she were to try without them the strain on the remaining four would increase by 50%. Since transferring spiritual energy was similar to the energy drain that vampires used, Yurika didn't want to do anything unreasonable.

Koutarou and the others did not feel like anything was off with Yurika about to use a large-scale spell. Since Encyclopedia saw everyday use, they didn't think much of it, and everyone was already aware of Yurika's skill when it came to handling the cane. When they had sent Yurika to drive away a stray cat, she had been able to use supersonic waves to control it.

Sanae's Crisis

But in fact, Yurika hadn't gotten better at using Encyclopedia. She was capable of making full use of its power from the start. The reason why it looked like she had improved to Koutarou and the others was because she would pretend to improve while using spells of a slightly higher level. And by repeating that, she was now able to use magic to the fullest of her capabilities in front of everyone.

A magical girl that was just supposed to be cosplaying was really using powerful spells. That unthinkable reality was unfolding right in front of them. But even if it was just cosplay, since everyone believed in Yurika, they bet on her magic. There was no longer any point in arguing whether Yurika was a cosplayer or the real deal. Her courage and magic were real, and everyone knew that.

“Alright! Let's start!”

“Yes! Precast – Energy Converter—”

Yurika immediately begin incanting her spell. While listening to her voice, Koutarou whispered to Sanae. It was necessary to put her in the middle of the room and have everyone else surround her. She couldn't just keep being held by Koutarou.

“Sanae.”

“But…”

But the uneasy Sanae didn't try to get away from Koutarou. Instead, she pushed towards him and grasped at his clothes.

“Don't worry. You can trust in Yurika right now.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I'd even bet my treasured bat on it.”

“…Okay.”

Koutarou's treasured bat was the baseball bat a player known as the God of Slugging had used. Since Sanae knew just how much he valued that bat, she decided to trust his judgement. She separated from Koutarou and floated in the center of the room. Right after that, the remaining six people surrounded her.

“Okay Yurika!”

“We're counting on you, Yurika-sama!”

“Yes!”

Yurika nodded with an unusually serious expression and continued her incantation.

The main spell is Transfer Soul Energy. On top of that, I need three additions to the spell: an invocation delay, expand the number of targeted people by six and extend the effective time to two minutes. And while I adjust the waves of six people through the Energy Converter to match Sanae-chan, I must use the cane's magic to stabilize Sanae-chan's body. Even if I prolong the cast time to reduce the magical power used, I only have one shot… can I do this?

As Yurika went through the procedure in her head, she realized how difficult of a job she had. Her usual negative side appeared and made her anxious.

“Don't be scared, you can do it!”

Noticing Yurika's anxiousness through her expression, Koutarou encouraged her.

“Y-Yes!”

When he did, her expression returned to the sharp and serious one from before. Seeing those two like that left Shizuka astonished.

As expected of Satomi-kun… For good or for bad, he understands Yurika-chan really well.

Koutarou had noticed the change in Yurika that no one else had. And with just a few words, Yurika had easily recovered. The powerful mutual trust witnessed from the two right now made their normal interactions seem like a lie.

Which in the end meant that the rough relationship they showed was just something on the surface. Deep inside, they had a clear and mutual trust for one another. Noticing that, Shizuka once again felt that only Koutarou would suffice as Yurika's guardian.

“Hey, Satomi-kun.”

And Shizuka wanted to ask Koutarou about that.

“What is it, landlord-san?”

“…Actually I'll ask you later. This is a bad time.”

But in the end, Shizuka decided not to ask. Even a gossip loving girl like herself realized that now was not the time for that. She couldn't ask him if he actually loved Yurika while Sanae's life was hanging in the balance.

“Is that so?”

Koutarou found Shizuka's behavior odd, but he quickly forgot about that for now. Like she said herself, now wasn't the time for that.

“Karama and Korama have almost reached their limit! Only 15 seconds left!”

“Please start, Yurika!”

“Okay!”

After nodding at Koutarou, Yurika readjusted her grasp on her cane one last time and spoke loudly.

“Encyclopedia! Release Invocation Delay! Recall – Precast – Energy Converter!”

At that moment, Yurika cast three spells.

The first was using her cane, Encyclopedia. Encyclopedia had the ability to read its user's mind and activate magic on its own. Yurika had entrusted this cane with the easiest of the three spells she needed; that was the spell to stabilize Sanae's body. Since this spell fell into the healing category, the cane emitted a blue light. The light enveloped Sanae and healed her body in place of Karama and Korama.

The next spell she activated was the spell that stole Koutarou and the other's spiritual energy and poured it into Sanae. Since it had been delayed in order to match the timing, it activated at the same time as Encyclopedia's spell.

The yellow light that emitted from Yurika wrapped around Koutarou and the others. In that moment, they were hit by a strong shock and could feel their strength leaving their bodies. At the same time, they were assaulted by a stabbing pain all over their body that made it hard to breathe.

“Ugh!?”

“Kyaa!?”

“S-So this… is the spell that steals spiritual energy…”

Sanae's Crisis

It felt something like being struck by a whip while running a marathon after being pushed to their very limits. Their bodies got heavy, and just standing became painful. Regardless of how much they breathed, they couldn't rid themselves of the sensation of choking. Having their spiritual energy drained was the same as having their very life force drained from their bodies. The acute pain and fatigue was a sign that their lives were in danger.

I see, no wonder Theia and Ruth-san are needed…

If Theia and Ruth hadn't been there, that strain would be 50% worse, and the others probably wouldn't be standing. And since this would continue on for two minutes, the strain would be immeasurable. Koutarou supported his heavy body as he realized that Yurika had been right.

“Kuuuuh, you mustn't lose consciousness!”

The one in most pain of all was Yurika herself. Since she prioritized on reducing the strain on everyone, she was draining spiritual energy from herself as well. Since Sanae had such a massive amount of spiritual energy, it was questionable if any long-term side effects could be avoided even with the six of them. Yurika couldn't exclude herself and increase the strain on the others. That's why she had to endure the pain while controlling her third spell.

Yurika's third spell gathered and merged the spiritual energy gathered from the second spell. Spiritual energy had different wavelengths depending on the individual. And if that wavelength wasn't matched to Sanae's own, it would be of no use to her. So for her third spell, Yurika had to match and adjust the wavelengths of six different people at the same time.

The difficulty level of the spell itself was lower than the second spell, but she had to make minute adjustments on six different wavelengths while having her own spiritual energy drained. So in effect, this was the most difficult spell of them all.

“Yurika Fight! Yu…rika… fi…ght!”

Yurika cheered for herself while she did her best to focus on controlling her spell. If her focus wavered for even a moment, the wavelengths of the spiritual energy would be distorted and would disperse without being of any use to Sanae.

“You can do it Yurika… You're our only hope right now…”

Koutarou was irritated that all he could do was pray.

Koutarou had thought of helping Yurika with Signaltin, but he couldn't control it's magical power as well as Alaia could. That's why he had no confidence that he would be of any help for this part that required detailed actions.

He could completely leave it up to the sword like he had when dealing with Kii's nightmare or when healing Maki's injury, but he didn't know if that would succeed. Since Sanae's life was on the line, he would leave the forcible solution as a last resort.

So as a result, there was nothing Koutarou could do right now. All he could do that Yurika would succeed so that he didn't have to rely on the sword's power.

“I, will definitely, save, Sanae-chan.”

Yurika desperately focused her mind to maintain her magic as she was assaulted by the pain.

10 seconds, 20 seconds, 30 seconds.

It was usually the kind of time that would pass in an instant as everyone laughed together. But now, that time just wasn't passing. This was the first time in Yurika's life that two minutes had felt this long.

“I will, become an, amazing, magical girl, like, Nana-san!”

But Yurika didn't back down. Despite the intense pain, she continued supporting her spell through an iron will.

One year ago, this task would most likely have been impossible for Yurika. Having separated from Nana, Yurika had spent her days escaping from assassins from Darkness Navy. Regardless of her potential when it came to magic, Yurika's personality was unsuited for fights and other kinds of dangers.

However, Yurika had grown immensely in the year since she had come to room 106. She met with Koutarou and the other invading girls and repeatedly fought with them. And that everyday life had trained Yurika.

More importantly, Yurika was no longer alone.

She wanted to graduate from Kitsushouharukaze high school together with Koutarou. She wanted to see the finale of her favorite magical girl anime together with Sanae. She wanted to recover the corpses of Yurika, Yurika A and Yurika B that Theia had left behind in a cave in one of her games. She hadn't tasted all of Kiriha's cooking. She was still in the middle of reading the manga that she had borrowed from Shizuka. And she wanted to do something to help Harumi with her love.

“I am, the magical girl, of love, and courage!”

She had a lot of things she wanted to do with the people she loved. So even if she was in a situation she hated, she would still do her best. During this year, she had learned love and hope, and obtained the courage to not run away when things got hard.

“Yurika… you…”

While Sanae looked at Yurika, she greatly changed her opinion of her. That was surely true of everyone in the room. Nobody had expected Yurika to work this hard, with just one exception. Only Koutarou believed that Yurika could do it.

“That's right… you can do it… You're someone who pulls things through!”

There was less than a minute left of the two minutes. Yurika was having a hard time breathing, but Koutarou was convinced that she could do it. In fact, she probably could have.

But that was when something unexpected happened.

A swerving and crashing sound rang out.

A traffic accident had occurred near Corona House. A car had been unable to fully turn around a corner and crashed into a wall, and fortunately nobody had been injured.

“…Ah!?”

But because of that accident, Yurika's concentration was disturbed.

The sound had been part of it, but Yurika had been worried that someone might have been hurt in the accident.

If Yurika didn’t care for people’s lives, she only had to endure and ignore the sound. If it was just that, she probably would have pulled through. She was definitely more courageous than before. But since she worried for the people outside, she had lost her focus on her spell. In other words, this was a tragic event that occurred because Yurika had the properties of a proper magical girl.

“Oh no!?”

Because Yurika had lost her focus, the six spiritual energies being adjusted into a single wavelength began returning to normal. If spiritual energy of two different wavelengths collided, they would cancel each other out and lose most of their power. With the six spiritual energies in

that state, they clashed and erased each other, with the end total being less than a third of the original spiritual energy.

“A-Again!?”

Sanae's body began losing its color once more. Since another spell was stabilizing her body, her appearance didn't change, but her color was gradually vanishing. The spiritual energy that Sanae got from the others could no longer support her.

What do I do!?

Yurika desperately racked her brain trying to recover from the current situation.

Even if she tried to regain control over her out of control spell, it would take time to readjust the six spiritual energies. That said, a third of the spiritual energy wasn't enough to sustain Sanae. If she could at least get at least twice the spiritual energy right away, there was a high chance that two minutes would pass before Sanae disappeared. But Yurika could only come up with a single way of making that happen, and it was an incredibly dangerous bet.

“Satomi-san, this is our only hope, lend me your power!”

And in this situation, Yurika ended up relying on Koutarou as expected. Yurika held her cane in both hands and pointed it towards Koutarou.

“Yurika!? Gaaaaaaah!”

The next moment the strain on Koutarou rapidly increased. The shock and pain assaulting Koutarou doubled since the amount of spiritual energy being drained was twice as much.

“I'm, sorry, Satomi-san, there is, no other, way!”

The same was true for Yurika. While enduring twice the pain, she desperately tried to support Sanae's existence.

Reunifying six different wavelengths right away would be hard, so she decided to focus on matching Koutarou's wavelength since he was very close to Sanae, and her own since it was easier to control.

Of course the strain increased, but with this method she could raise the supplied spiritual energy to two-thirds of the original. It was an incredibly dangerous act, but Yurika had bet everything on it.

“Yurika! Koutarou!”

Sanae couldn't stand watching the two people she got along so well with suffer so much. She closed her eyes and prayed that this time would pass as quickly as possible so that they would stay safe.

“I'm, sorry… Uuuughh…”

Yurika felt bad for doing something like this without Koutarou's permission and for not being able to properly apologize. Right now, all Yurika could do was try her best to remain conscious while maintaining her spell. Sweat poured down from her forehead and her throat was dry. She could no longer stand and fell down on her butt. She had already passed her limit. Yurika was maintaining her spell, but it would be strange for her not to lose consciousness.

“…D-Don't worry, Yurika! You are, r-right!”

Koutarou raised his voice in an attempt to encourage Yurika.

“You are, someone who pulls through! You, save, people! Who cares, what, you are like normally! You're, you're a splendid magical girl!”

Sanae's Crisis

Since Yurika was tuning Koutarou's wavelength, she was currently partly connected to his soul. And without the other four, she could clearly sense Koutarou's feelings.

Satomi-san… believes in me…

Koutarou wasn't just saying things to cheer Yurika up; instead, his will directly spoke to Yurika's soul. He had a clear sense of trust that was convinced that Yurika would pull it off. He had a clear image of the future where he, Yurika and Sanae were carefreely chatting. In his imagined future, Yurika was still clumsy and often failed. But right now, Yurika wished to return to those days as well.

And wishes would turn into power.

“Haaaaaaaaaaahh!”

The scream that had spawned from her dream explosively increased her magical power, to the point that even people without talent for magic could see the released magical power shine.

If Yurika was to fight against anyone in this state, she would surely win regardless of how strong her opponent was. That was just how terrific the power that Yurika had mustered really was.

Part 3

Just a few seconds before two minutes would have passed, the voice of one of the hunters came through the phone pressed against Kiriha's ear.

“Nee-san! I got a report from aniki! The device has been setup!”

“Well done!”

The normally calm Kiriha clenched her fist in joy.

“How's her body!?”

At the same time, Sanae's body that had weakened by quite a bit instantly recovered. Her appearance was as vivid as normal, without any trace of fading or distorting.

“Yurika, that's enough! We made it!”

Seeing Kiriha's behavior and Sanae's appearance, Koutarou realized that the plan had succeeded and conveyed that fact to Yurika who was still pointing her magical cane at Sanae.

“…Ahh…”

Hearing that she had made it, the tension in Yurika released. And at the same time, all of the spells came undone while Yurika collapsed on the floor. Having poured her everything into it, she no longer had enough energy to move her body.

Yurika crashed face first into the floor like always.

“Yurika!”

Seeing that, Koutarou forgot that he was exhausted as well and rushed over to her.

“Keep it together, Yurika!”

“Yurika-sama!”

“Yurika-chan!”

Theia, Ruth and Shizuka followed. Kiriha was still on the phone, but she anxiously gazed at Yurika.

“Koutarou, is Yurika okay!?”

The one the most worried for Koutarou was Sanae. She had been getting along really well with Yurika lately, and it was obvious that she had worked so hard for Sanae's sake. Because of that, Sanae was exceptionally worried about Yurika's condition.

“Just wait a minute…”

Koutarou stopped Sanae and checked up on Yurika. He checked her breathing, her pulse, her complexion and lastly her spiritual energy. Koutarou then gave Sanae a big nod.

“She's fine. She hit her face a little, but she only fainted.”

“Thank god…”

Yurika had fallen over and hit her face. Normally, everyone would simply be amazed, but this time was different. Everyone let out a sigh of relief and smiled.

“Seriously… to think she'd hit her face at the very end, just what you would expect from Yurika…”

“This much hard work is something that you would imagine the normal Yurika doing after all.”

“I just hope it doesn't leave a mark on her face…”

The girls' smiles were all praising Yurika as they all showed her their appreciation. If Yurika had just been conscious, her eyes most likely would have sprung wide open from surprise.

"Thank you too, Koutarou."

"You better thank Yurika once she wakes up too, okay?"

"Yeah."

Sanae smiled as she stared at Yurika in Koutarou's arms. It was then that she finally turned her attention to herself.

"Haah… I wasn't sure what would happen for a moment there…"

Sanae stared at her arms and then looked down to check her body and legs. Her body had returned to its normal state, and there was not a single trace of the incident from just before.

"Isn't that great, Sanae?"

Koutarou relaxed as well. Since they had escaped from the crisis for now, he let out a sigh of relief.

"Yeah!"

Sanae cheerfully nodded and clung onto Koutarou's back like always. She then peeked over Koutarou's shoulder and stared at Yurika. Once she woke up, everything would be back to normal.

"Koutarou."

Kiriha was the only one who still had a serious expression on her face. After putting away her cellphone, she touched Koutarou's shoulder.

"What is it, Kiriha-san?"

"I'm sorry for saying this while you're so relieved, but it's not over yet. Sanae has only recovered temporarily. The fundamental problem hasn't been resolved."

"What!?"

Hearing that, Koutarou's expression changed. He knew that Kiriha could be trusted, and her seriously spoken words were enough to return Koutarou's tension.

"You're kidding!?"

And if Koutarou trusted her, so would Sanae. Sanae leaned forward and looked at Kiriha.

"What do you—no, wait a minute?"

Koutarou was about to reflexively question her, but he noticed something mid-sentence.

"Now that I think about it…"

Ever since Sanae's body had begun disappearing her actions had been very precise, as if she knew this would happen. And he could tell that the actions of the person she had been talking to on the phone had saved Sanae, but this too was odd. The person she had been speaking had never showed up here.

"Kiriha-san, what do you know? And what kind of situation is Sanae in?"

In the end, Koutarou ended up asking Kiriha. Sanae left the talking to Koutarou, though since this was about herself, her hold around Koutarou's neck naturally grew stronger.

"Explaining will take a long time, but we don't have much. It will be faster for you to see for yourself. Come with me, Satomi Koutarou!"

Sanae's Crisis

Quick to action, Kiriha began moving towards the entrance. Her destination wasn't underground, but somewhere on the surface.

“Okay! Let's go, Sanae!”

“Yeah!”

“We will go too.”

“Yes, your highness!”

“I'll be right behind you after I lock up!”

Koutarou and the others quickly chased after Kiriha. They still didn't understand the situation, but they knew that it was for Sanae's sake.

Part 4

At this time, there were a set of eyes watching Koutarou and the others dash out of room 106.

“Oh, looks like things are getting interesting…”

The voice was a female one, but they couldn't be seen. She was a ghost, but she didn't have a body as clearly visible as Sanae's. She had run out of spiritual energy and was moments away from passing on or disappearing.

“Fufufufufu, with this, I might be able to get revenge on them… fufufufufufu…”

She held a strong sense of hatred for Koutarou and the others. And that strong hate barely managed to keep her in the world of the living.

“It's their fault. That I died… that I can't wear my beautiful clothes… all of it…”

The reason for her hate was an unjustified resentment.

She was one of the ghosts that had been hired by the ghost hunters to attack Sanae. Because of Koutarou's counter attack, all of the other ghosts had passed on, but she alone remained. Her unjustified hate and her obsession with the land of the living overpowered the power that tried to make her pass on. She had ever since waited for Koutarou and the others to show an opening. This too was because of her hatred and obsession.

“I may have failed before… fufufu… but next time I won't… I'll show them…”

She had been the reason for the traffic accident that had broken Yurika's concentration. Her plan was to make Yurika's spell fail, steal the gathered spiritual energy and absorb Sanae. Fortunately, this tragedy was avoided through Yurika's desperate efforts, but that only served to fuel her hate even more.

“Fufufu… If I wait a moment longer, my chance will come… I only have to wait a little longer… fufufufufufufufu.”

As the calendar passed the middle of March, the temperature was starting to rise again, but the air around the woman was still freezing cold.

Part 5

When she woke up, Yurika was on Koutarou's back.

“…Huh…?”

Koutarou was carrying Yurika on his back while running down a sidewalk. Their surroundings were dark, with only a weak street light to provide them with any light.

“U-Uhm…”

Yurika's memories ended with her passing out in room 106. And since she was now in the middle of the city at night while being carried by Koutarou, she was now confused.

“Where… huh? Why is Satomi-san–?”

“Koutarou, looks like Yurika woke up.”

Sanae noticed that Yurika had woken up and reported that to Koutarou.

“I see. Thanks Sanae.”

Koutarou turned to the side and saw Yurika blinking with her drowsy eyes while looking at her surroundings. Seeing Yurika act like normal, some of the tension built up in Koutarou was released.

“You awake, Yurika?”

“Y-Yes…”

Still not sure what was going on, Yurika nodded hesitantly. The next moment her mind cleared up and she remembered something important.

“T-That's right, Sanae-chan! Where is Sanae-chan!?”

Yurika's memories had cut out after the part where Koutarou had told her to stop, that's why she didn't know what had become of Sanae. So Yurika looked around in search for her.

“I'm right here.”

Sanae turned around so that Yurika could see her face while floating in front of Koutarou. And when Yurika saw Sanae's cheerful smile she opened her eyes wide.

“Sanae-chan! You're okay!”

“It's because of you. Thank you.”

“T-Thank god… I wasn't sure what was going to happen for a moment…”

Relieved, strength left Yurika's body and she leaned on Koutarou.

“So, what are we doing now?”

Having calmed down, Yurika began wondering why she was outside. She had seen that everyone from room 106 was here while she had been looking around. She could tell that everyone was in the middle of going somewhere, but she didn't know why.

“We're still not in the clear yet. We're headed for the hospital.”

“The hospital? Why?”

“Because Kiriha-san said so.”

Everyone was on their way to the city's hospital. It was the same hospital where Koutarou had been taken after he had hit his head at work last spring.

“Sanae-chan is a ghost, but can she be treated at a hospital?”

“Who knows. She said that it would take time to explain, so we haven't heard anything yet.”

Koutarou pointed towards Kiriha with his chin as he said that. Kiriha was running a little a bit behind Koutarou and the others while she was talking to someone on her phone. She hadn't explained anything to everyone else partly because she had to stay on the phone.

“We'll be there soon, so we'll find out then.”

“I just hope it's not something scary…”

“I don't want that either.”

“But, but, wouldn't you be scared if a ghost or something appeared?”

“I'm a ghost too you know.”

“Sanae-chan is Sanae-chan. A ghost is much scarier.”

“Weren't you scared of me at first?”

Koutarou was happy that Yurika and Sanae had begun carefreely chatting like normal, but his expression turned more serious once again when he saw the front gate to the hospital in front of him.

“Satomi-kun, someone's there.”

Shizuka who was running next to Koutarou pointed towards the dark area right before the front gate. Since she had good eyesight, she was the first to spot what was standing there.

“You're right…”

In the darkness stood two people. From their silhouette's, it was a tall and slim man right next to a short and fat man. The two were facing Koutarou and the others, and it looked like they were waiting for them.

Could these be the guys Kiriha-san was talking to? Are they underground people?

Koutarou thought of that as he closed in on the two. The two then started moving and came out of the darkness, their faces becoming clearer for him to see. The moment he saw their faces, he spoke with a wild voice.

“Ah, those guys!?”

Koutarou had seen them before. They were the pair he had come across when he went to the beach last year.

“Satomi-kun, do you know them?”

“You know them too, landlord-san! They're the perverts from the beach!”

“Eh!? Seriously!?”

“What!? H-He's right! They're the perverts from the beach!”

“Huh? Were they there?”

“They are the ones who kidnapped Sanae-sama.”

“Oh yeah, you were captured by the cosclub so you couldn't come…”

They were the ghost hunters that had captured Sanae and planned to sell her. During the process, they had been unlucky enough to be mistaken for perverts.

“Koutarou, do you think they're up to something evil again?”

“Satomi-kun, could it be that they did something to Sanae?”

Sanae's Crisis

“Those guys! How dare they show up again!”

Since they had exposed Sanae to danger before, Koutarou and the others were incredibly hostile towards them. Because of that, Koutarou and the invaders prepared to finish off the ghost hunters for good this time.

“Fufufufufu, your luck ran out when we crossed paths again.”

“Do it, Theia! Send those lolicons flying!”

“Your highness, since it's night, we better reduce the power and sound.”

“I know. I have matured too! Blue Knight, anti-personnel laser!”

Amongst the weapons aboard the spaceship, the Blue Knight, the anti-personnel laser was amongst the weakest. And since lasers don't make sounds, they were perfect for attacking at night. The hunters' lives were hanging by a thread.

“Aaaaah, stop, wait!”

“We haven't done anything bad!”

Noticing the weapon that appeared by Theia's side, the hunters began panicking. They finally realized that their lives were in danger.

“We haven't laid a finger on Sanae-chan!”

“We only watched over her every night!”

“…They're clearly stalkers after Sanae-chan.”

“Theia, shoot them.”

“Yes. Release the safety. I'll leave the attacking to you.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

“Aaaaa, nee-san, d-did you not explain the situation yet!?”

“Oh right… Theia-dono, please hold your attack.”

Just before Theia's laser cannon was about to fire, Kiriha stopped everyone.

“Why stop me?”

“They are not the enemy. They are subordinates that I have employed.”

“Employed!? W-What do you mean!?”

The words that left Kiriha's lips were hard for Koutarou to accept.

Why would she need to employ them!? They did such horrible things to Sanae!

Koutarou spoke in an accusing tone, but that was because of the men's track record. If it hadn't been Kiriha, Koutarou might not have listened.

“I will explain everything, including that. We have finally reached our destination after all.”

Kiriha calmed Koutarou as she stopped. And when she looked up, she saw one of the tallest buildings in Kitsushouharukaze city in front of her.

The Kitsushouharukaze municipal hospital.

This building was their destination.

Part 6

Despite it being in the middle of the night, the hospital wasn't completely empty. There were nurses on the night shift, doctors on duty and guards. But Koutarou and the others didn't come across anyone working at the hospital as they entered. That was because Kiriha had arranged for that while they were on their way here from room 106. As a result, Koutarou and the others were able to reach their destination without any obstacles in the way.

“Well done, you two.”

“We're fortunate it happened during the night. If it had happened during the day, that mother with a great intuition would have been here, and things might have gotten a little problematic.”

“It's here.”

The fat hunter who was leading everyone stopped in front of a private sickroom on the top floor of the hospital. They were in the department where long-term patients were hospitalized.

The fat hunter slid the door open. After opening the door, he moved to the side and let everyone through.

However, nobody tried to move. They were hesitant to enter the sickroom. And the room being dark added to that hesitation.

“Everyone, please hurry on inside. We can't allow ourselves to be seen by other patients.”

Kiriha urged the stopped group to move inside.

“Y-Yeah.”

Koutarou was the first to react to Kiriha's voice and he cautiously entered the room. The rest followed in his footsteps.

Since it's a sickroom, someone is probably being hospitalized here…

Entering the room, Koutarou looked around for the patient that should be inside. He then noticed a person sleeping on the bed the furthest into the room thanks to the weak light of the emergency light.

So that person is this room's patient.

Though the reason was unclear, Kiriha had brought everyone here to meet this patient. Looking for an answer as to why, Koutarou slowly stepped closer to the bed.

That was when Kiriha who entered the room last switched on the light for the room. The room lit up right away revealing the person sleeping on the bed.

“What? How could this be!?”

“Eeeeehh!?”

“What!?”

Koutarou, Yurika who was resting on his back, and Sanae who was floating next to him were so surprised by the person sleeping on the bed that their hearts almost stopped beating. Yurika was so surprised that she had jumped off of Koutarou's back and rushed up to the bed.

Sanae's Crisis

Sanae's Crisis

“What's wrong!?”

“Ruth!”

“Yes!”

Seeing Koutarou's reaction, Shizuka, Theia and Ruth also approached the bed and six people were now surrounding it. And upon seeing the face of the person sleeping in the bed, everyone was rendered speechless.

After the room remained silent for ten seconds, Koutarou and Sanae finally opened the mouths.

“S-Sanae, this is Sanae!”

“It's me, I'm sleeping here!”

Surprisingly enough, the one sleeping on the bed was none other than Sanae. The Sanae on the bed looked a couple of years older than the Sanae next to Koutarou and looked a bit mature. But her appearance was without a mistake the same as Sanae's. Everyone there was convinced that it was indeed her.

“That's right. It's Sanae. I was just as surprised when I saw her here for the first time.”

Kiriha approached the rest. Since Kiriha and the two ghost hunters had known about this in advance, they remained calm.

“What is the meaning of this!? Why is Sanae sleeping here!? It's not just a look-a-like, right!?”

Koutarou had already checked the spiritual energy of the sleeping person and confirmed that it is indeed Sanae. Both the color and shape of her spiritual energy was identical to the Sanae next to him. The only difference was her age and the strength of her aura. Koutarou just couldn't believe it.

“Allow me to tell you everything. That is why I brought you all here.”

Kiriha calmly responded to the excited Koutarou.

However, the reason why her expression had a hint of sadness was because of the cruel fate that awaited that only she knew of.

Part 7

Kiriha had found Sanae in this hospital more than half a year ago.

After Koutarou and the others had defeated the hunters, Kiriha had given them a deal. In exchange for a large sum of money, she demanded that they would no longer attack Sanae and that they give her all the information they have regarding Sanae. The hunters agreed and accepted the deal.

The information she had received at this time included the fact that there was one more Sanae admitted to this hospital. Several years ago, she had been struck with an unknown disease and grown weak, and she had been forcibly admitted. In other words, Sanae wasn't a proper ghost. And the reason for why her parents hadn't returned to room 106 was because they had moved to their own parents' house which was closer to the hospital.

Kiriha had doubted the information at first, but as her investigations continued, she became convinced that it was Sanae herself. After that, she devoted herself to curing Sanae.

There was only one single reason for Kiriha wanting to cure Sanae, and that was simple goodwill. Kiriha disliked fighting, and she was painfully aware of the feelings one felt when waiting for their loved ones. That's why she wanted to return Sanae to her parents as soon as possible.

Of course, this was a large minus for Kiriha who wanted to prolong the battle for room 106. If Sanae recovered and left room 106, the balance of power would shift and the radical faction would be stimulated. Kiriha would be unable to hold back the radicals as they would surely claim that this was their chance. So Kiriha began laying down the groundwork to cure Sanae early on, prepared that Sanae would actually secede from the battle.

As Kiriha held back the radical faction, she began using underground technology in an attempt to treat Sanae.

But as she continued her investigation, Kiriha ran into a big wall. And that wall was that the Sanae in the hospital was conscious.

If the ghost Sanae had just been a soul that had escaped its body, it would have been so simple. It would just be a simple matter of using the People of the Earth's spiritual energy technology to bind her soul to her body. There had been several examples of that happening in the past. However, the Sanae in the hospital could function as a normal person. And this considerably confused Kiriha.

But at the same time, Kiriha could understand a few things. The hunters had targeted Sanae because she was a forgotten, loose spirit. If her real body could move on its own, nobody would be troubled if they captured Sanae. To them, she was the perfect target, and they would have a clean conscience knowing that her parents wouldn't be hurt.

And as she continued her investigations, she learned that the ghost Sanae with Koutarou and the others was a piece of her spiritual energy that had separated from the main body and became a ghost.

A few years ago, spiritual energy began separating from Sanae's soul which caused her body to grow weaker. Eventually, her parents noticed how weak she had gotten and took her to their own parent's home. After that, the real Sanae had been admitted to the hospital, and Sanae's spiritual energy that had been left behind in room 106 began its activities as a ghost. After chasing out several tenants, Koutarou eventually moved in. This was the reason behind why Sanae had been in room 106.

Kiriha didn't know why the spiritual energy had separated from Sanae's soul. It might have been a condition she had been born with, or her soul might have received a huge shock in the past. Regardless of the reason, Sanae's current condition was troublesome.

Sanae's Crisis

With the majority of her spiritual energy being with her ghost half, the real Sanae grew ever weaker. And after these years, she was now in an incredibly dangerous condition. It was necessary to merge the ghost and the body as soon as possible.

But that was the problem. To return Sanae to her original state, they would have to return all of the spiritual energy that the ghost had. They need to reattach the parts that had separated back to her soul that had separated. But this kind of thing was a first even for the People of the Earth, and they didn't have any technology for it. Because of that, a large amount of time to develop it was needed. In order to keep Koutarou and the others from worrying during the long time it would take, Kiriha had continued her preparations without telling them.

However, Sanae was growing weak at a faster rate than the progress on the technology was being made. And tonight, she had weakened to the point where it got difficult to maintain her life. Since the real Sanae had started to die because of a severe lack of spiritual energy, the ghost Sanae was about to disappear as well.

Part 8

“…Strictly speaking, the Sanae that we know is not just a normal ghost. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that the Sanae sleeping in this bed has unconsciously created an artificial ghost.”

Having finished her explanation, Kiriha stopped speaking and pointed to the wall of the sickroom.

“That's why, despite Sanae being a ghost, she could freely change her clothes. Of course the clothes she has are limited…”

A large amount of clothes were hung up on the sickroom wall. And a majority of them were familiar to Koutarou and the others. They were all clothes that the ghost Sanae had worn.

“Ah…”

While she looked at the clothes, Sanae could hear the voice of her other self.

When I get better I'm going to wear them… that's why I have to hang in there…

It was the voice of the girl sleeping on the bed. She would look at the clothes lined up at the wall everyday while thinking that. That's why the ghost Sanae had worn them. Just like she had wished, a healthy Sanae was wearing them.

“Y-You're kidding… that can't…”

Sanae was very shaken up.

Up until now Sanae, had been doubtful, but she could feel that Kiriha was speaking the truth when she looked at the clothes on the wall. That the girl sleeping in front of her was her other self.

“Sanae…”

Kiriha opened her eyes in astonishment and looked at Sanae sympathetically. The same was true for the others as well. It was obvious that Sanae was shocked. But nobody had a way to ease that shock. If they tried to haphazardly cheer her up, it would only end up hurting her even more. All they could do was watch her, and that frustrated them more than anything.

“That's not possible! Because, because, Koutarou!”

Sanae flew towards Koutarou and pleaded in a loud voice with large tears in her eyes.

“If Kiriha is right, then that would mean that Papa and Mama wouldn't come back to me, right!?”

That was the biggest shock to Sanae. Compared to that, the problem of why she was in room 106 to begin with was a small one.

“It's a lie, right Koutarou!?”

“That's…”

“Please, just say it's a lie! Please!”

Sanae already knew that was the truth. But even then, she couldn't accept it. Even if they hadn't intended to, Sanae just couldn't accept that her parents had effectively abandoned her and that they wouldn't come back.

It was a major problem that made Sanae question her own existence.

Admitting that her parents wouldn't come back would be the same as admitting that everyone up until now had been for nothing. And that was something that Sanae just couldn't do.

“Waaaaaaah, Uaaaaaaaaaah! No, I don't want this! I don't want to be alone! I don't want to, Koutarou! Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Sanae's Crisis

While shedding large tears, Sanae jumped at Koutarou. She cried out loudly while wrapping her arms around his neck. Having found out that she was all alone, the only one she could now rely on was Koutarou.

“Sanae… why do you think you're alone?”

“Because, because! Uhh, uaaaah, because! Papa and Mama, Papa and Mama won't–!”

Sanae tried her best to convey her feelings, but she couldn't put them into words.

“Your parents admitted your other self to a hospital. They want you to be healthy. Doesn't that mean that they want you to come back?”

Sanae's parents wanted Sanae to regain what she had lost, and that's why they admitted her to the hospital. That's why they hadn't abandoned Sanae.

“Uuuhhh, but, but, I-I, waited and waited there, for, for, so many years, and that was all for, nothing, waaaaaaaahh!”

However that was a very rational way of thinking, so Sanae, who had spent several years alone, couldn't emotionally accept it. She continued crying without any outlet for her feelings.

“Hey, Sanae.”

Koutarou gently embraced the crying Sanae.

“A long time has passed since you, me and everyone met, but…”

“Uuhh, Koutarou, Koutarou!”

Sanae desperately held onto Koutarou. It was like she tried to replace the warmth she had lost with his.

“Was it really that boring? Was meeting us all for nothing?”

“Ah…”

In that moment, Sanae stopped moving. Her crying gradually turned more silent. And instead she hugged Koutarou even tighter.

“Sanae-chan, you are my precious friend! You are definitely not alone!”

Yurika declared with a smile. Sanae was her friend. If she wasn't, Yurika probably wouldn't have broken the law and used magic for personal reasons in order to save Sanae.

“That's right, Sanae. At the very least, I have matured after meeting you. And if you call that for nothing, I will be sad. The only goal of mountaineering isn't just to stand at the top, right?”

Theia's feelings were the same. Through this year, they had been together through the fun and the hard times. And they had grown together. Theia couldn't think of that as being for nothing. And she wanted Sanae to understand that.

“It's just as her highness says, Sanae-sama. Didn't so many happy things happen?”

“Yeah, everyone is right! A landlord and her tenant are like parent and child. It's fine even if you don't have a reason!”

Ruth and Shizuka were the same. There had been some minor troubles when they first met Sanae, but overall, everyday had been a good one. And they wished that would continue from now on as well.

“Sanae. Nobody thinks of you as unnecessary. Even if you were to lose the game and the right to the room, nobody would tell you to leave. Everyone needs you. And isn't that the same for your parents?”

And finally, Kiriha wrapped up the encouragement.

There was no need for Sanae to be sad. Everyone loved her, and the same was true for her parents. They might have missed each other, but her parents still loved her.

“Everyone…”

Sanae looked at the faces of everyone present with her eyes wide. She had never been told this clearly that she was needed.

“Sanae, what do you think?”

“…Everyday was so fun. And I want it to stay the same forever…”

Warmth began spreading throughout Sanae's frozen heart once more. It spread in an instant and melted the ice surrounding her heart.

“Then why are you crying?”

“Because… Koutarou, you still haven't said anything sweet to me yet.”

“You're already feeling better, aren't you?”

“Nope. I'm depressed. Because you won't say anything loving.”

Sanae showed a slight smile and brought her cheek closer to Koutarou. Her cheeks were still wet from her tears, but those were remnants of the past as she was no longer crying.

“Of course I won't say anything like that in this situation.”

“Cheapskate.”

“I'm taking care not to spoil children too much.”

In the end, Koutarou didn't say anything Sanae wanted to hear. But he still hugged her a little tighter.

“Hehe…”

Since that conveyed his feelings well enough, Sanae didn't say anything more. To her, words didn't hold that much meaning.

“So, Kiriha-san, Sanae will be in danger like this, right?”

Still hugging Sanae, Koutarou asked Kiriha. Sanae looked at Koutarou's face once before silently looking at Kiriha. She understood that she was in danger, but she left the talking to Koutarou.

“That's right. Currently, a device to stabilize spiritual energy is being used, but that is only a temporary measure.”

As Kiriha explained, she pointed to the device set up next to the bed. The device was about a meter tall, but it was a rugged looking device with its circuits and wires exposed. It was quite the opposite from refined. It was just like she had said, a temporary measure.

“With a device this size, an hour is the limit. But we can't just set up a larger one and hide it. We need a proper solution.”

In order to save both the unconscious Sanae who was growing ever weaker and the ghost Sanae whose form was being stabilized by the device, the only way would be to return back as one, as they were the same person.

“That said, is that even possible? It's still being developed, right?”

“It's impossible right now, but we're a step away from a breakthrough.”

Kiriha shook her head.

“Actually, a massive amount of spiritual energy will be generated when we return Sanae's spiritual energy, but we don't have the technology to stabilize it.”

“Then you're stuck.”

“No. What's impossible is trying to resolve it with just our technology.”

Kiriha shook her head once more and pointed at Yurika.

“Judging from what happened before, if Yurika follows up with her magic it should become possible.”

Even with the technology of the People of the Earth, they can't directly heal Sanae. But if Yurika were to make up for that problem with magic, it should be possible to save her. This was a path that had opened thanks to their trust in Yurika and her magic. That was why Kiriha had made sure to bring the unconscious Yurika with them.

“Me again!?”

Yurika pointed at her face and opened her eyes wide in surprise. She didn't expect that she would get another turn.

“Please, Yurika. What we need right now is minute control of spiritual energy.”

“But, but, I'm not very confident I can do it…”

The exhausted and off guard Yurika no longer had even a trace of the impressive atmosphere from before.

Doing that thing again… Not possible, it's completely impossible!

Yurika had returned to her pessimistic self.

“If you can't do it, Sanae will die. You will just have to do it, confidence or not.”

“Please, Yurika.”

“E-Even if you say that, I can't! Satomi-san, help me! It's impossible for me, right?”

Yurika was starting to tear up and turned to Koutarou for help. She wanted Koutarou to say that she couldn't do it so that she could take it easy.

“Koutarou, that's what Yurika is saying.”

“Satomi-kun, can't you do something?”

Theia and Shizuka spoke to Koutarou, they believed that he would be able to do something about Yurika.

“Well…”

It wasn't like he didn't understand how Yurika must feel. She had really given it her all before. And it would be cruel to ask her to do same thing once more.

But… Yurika is probably…

After thinking for a while with his arms crossed, Koutarou spoke out to Yurika.

“Yurika.”

“It's not possible for me, Satomi-san!”

Yurika was convinced that Koutarou would side with her.

“…Is it really impossible?”

Koutarou spoke while staring directly into Yurika's eyes.

Sanae's Crisis

“Ah…”

Yurika was swept away by Koutarou's serious stare. His eyes shone with a strong sense of trust and expectation. And the moment she saw that, Yurika could feel her timidness and anxiety vanish.

I can't betray this… my precious friend is relying on me…

Instead confidence and courage replaced the anxiety and timidness.

“I'll do it. I will show you I can.”

Yurika nodded powerfully. She had returned to the magical girl she had been like before.

“Please do.”

“Yes!”

Looking at Yurika who had regained her love and courage, Kiriha made a fist and raised two fingers, her index finger and middle finger, in the shape of a scissor from rock paper scissors.

“With this, that's one problem taken care of. Only one more remains.”

Kiriha then lowered her middle finger leaving the index finger standing.

“There's still a problem?”

“There is. That said, this is if we succeed…”

As Kiriha said that she pointed to her own head with her raised finger.

“The problem is her memories.”

“Memories? What do you mean?”

Koutarou had a bad premonition, as that was just how miserable Kiriha's face looked when she spoke.

“Sanae will almost certainly lose the memories of the time she spent as a ghost.”

“Ehhh!? W-Wait a minute, what is that supposed to mean!?”

Sanae's life was in danger, fortunately there was a solution. That's why Sanae had felt a little relieved. But now all of a sudden she hears that she will lose her memories. Because she had started to relax, these words took her by great surprise. That's why even though she had left Koutarou to do the talking, she instinctively leaned forward and interrupted Kiriha.

“The memories you have now are memories you have acquired in a spiritual form. And even if your spiritual energy is poured into your real body, it won't overwrite the memories in your brain.”

“I don't understand, explain it with words I can understand!”

“In other words, your memories right now are like your past life. Once Sanae wakes up, she most likely won't remember us at all.”

If the ghost Sanae and the real Sanae merged, her memories would be written into her soul. But it won't overwrite the network of nerves making up her brain. That's why Sanae would have to call up the memories of her soul every time she wanted to remember Koutarou and the others. But that was incredibly difficult. The action of calling up the memories of the soul was practically the same as calling up the memories of a past life. There were extremely few people that could do that. And because of that, the chances of Sanae being able to do that was very low.

“T-Then I won't know who Koutarou and everyone are if me and the me sleeping over there stick together!?”

“Sadly, that would be the case. I'm sorry Sanae, we didn't have enough time to do anything about your memories.”

Kiriha apologized with a sorrowful expression.

Of course, it wasn't like Kiriha hadn't thought about restoring Sanae's memories. But because the problems regarding the development of the device took time, her life took priority to her memories. And Sanae having been a ghost for several years was also a problem. The amount of information that had to be copied over to her brain was simply too much. Because of their priority on Sanae's life, and the strain on Sanae's brain, they hadn't gotten around to coming up with a good way to restore Sanae's memories.

“N-No…”

Sanae frantically shook her head.

“No, I don't want that! I definitely don't want to lose my memories and become a different person!”

Sanae had understood what Kiriha was saying.

Kiriha was saying that in order for Sanae to survive, she had to throw away her memories.

“Because, because I won't remember how warm Koutarou is, or how fun it is to be with everyone!”

Sanae was crying.

She just couldn't accept losing her memories.

“I'm stupid, so I will do some mean things again! Like throwing dictionaries at Koutarou! I finally became friends with everyone, so I don't want to go back to throwing tantrums like a child again! I finally, finally… waaaaahhh!”

Losing her memories was the same as losing the bonds she had built up until now. That she would lose her fun everyday life and gentle warmth. And that was something she didn't want to accept.

“But Sanae, if you don't return to your body you will die!”

Even though Sanae couldn't accept losing her memories, Theia wanted her to live, no matter what.

“I know that… I already know!”

Sanae had to make a choice: either she would die with her memories, or live without them.

“But I can't choose! I don't want to die, but I won't be me without my memories! Then that's just the same as dying!”

However, the two options had the same outcome for Sanae.

The Sanae sleeping in bed would be the one to survive. Since her memories as a ghost wouldn't be inherited, one could say that the Sanae who knew Koutarou and the others would disappear. And that could be likened to death.

Even if she died or survived, the Sanae who was with Koutarou and the others would be lost. This was a harsh fate that left no options.

“This is unfair! I won't see you again either way!”

Sanae shouted and strongly clung onto Koutarou.

“I want to be here! I want to be together with everyone!”

Sanae's Crisis

Sanae didn't want to let go of her current life, the bonds she had formed in room 106, of which the most important of those bonds was the one with Koutarou who was currently hugging her.

“So this, is just unfair!”

The warmth Sanae was feeling was something that she would trade her life to keep.

And that's why it happened.

“Agh.”

All of a sudden, Koutarou started vomiting blood. At the same time, he lost consciousness and collapsed.

“Koutarou!?”

Sanae who was next to him hurriedly held him up. Koutarou was completely out and he was like a doll leaning against Sanae.

“What is this!? At this rate Koutarou will die!”

As a ghost, Sanae could quickly tell that Koutarou was losing spiritual energy at an unbelievable pace just by touching him. At this rate, Koutarou would die shortly.

“Why!? How!? Koutarou! Koutarou!”

However, Sanae didn't understand why. All she could do was helplessly watch on as the person she loved more than anything was dying.

Memories and Life

Part 1

March 17, Wednesday

Clan, who had just given Koutarou a general exam, adjusted her glasses while reporting her findings to Theia and the others.

“His blood pressure, pulse and temperature are all dropping. And it's not just that, all vital activities are on the decline. Medically speaking… if this continues, Koutarou will without a doubt die.”

Clan had appeared shortly after Koutarou collapsed. The bracelet he was wearing had alerted her that he was in danger. And after seeing Koutarou collapsed, she carried him to the Cradle to treat him. Since it was a ship designed for research, it was more suitable than the Blue Knight in order to diagnose Koutarou. At that time, Theia and Clan had started to quarrel with each other, but Ruth and Kiriha intervened and resolved it. And because of that, those related to room 106 were now onboard the Cradle.

“He is barely holding on thanks to my medical measures, but he won't last for long.”

Clan felt a sense of relief as she explained to Theia and the others.

I made it just in time… Thank you, Alaia-san…

Koutarou had been put down in a bed in the lab and had a respiratory device and IV drip attached to him, along with many other devices.

But what was actually keeping him alive was Signaltin, which Clan had hidden under the bed. The decrease in his vitality was faster than standard medical treatment could handle. If it wasn't for Signaltin, Koutarou would probably be dead already.

“What happened to Koutarou!? Kiriha, tell me, you know, right!?”

Everyone was shaken up by what had happened to Koutarou, and amongst them, the most shaken was Sanae. Of course that was only natural, as not only was her own life in danger, but her most important person was now dying in front of her as well.

“Based on all of the results, there is almost no mistaking it.”

Koutarou's body had been examined through spiritual technology, magic and science. And the results of those three methods pointed to a single reason.

“Koutarou is…”

Kiriha hesitated. She had expected this kind of situation might happen, but she was hesitant to say it out loud. But she didn't allow herself to do so and steeled herself as she spoke that harsh truth.

“…Koutarou is having his spiritual energy stolen by you, Sanae.”

“Me!? You're lying! I wouldn't do something so horrible!”

“That's right Kiriha! I can't believe what you are saying! Sanae wouldn't try to kill Koutarou!”

Nobody could accept what Kiriha was saying. And the two that vocally objected were Sanae, who had been pointed out as the culprit, and Theia. Everyone in the room also believed that Kiriha was mistaken.

“This is unrelated to Sanae's will. Her very existence as a ghost is killing Koutarou.”

If possible, Kiriha didn't want to believe it either. But if she didn't, Koutarou would die. And with a sorrowful expression, she continued her explanation.

Memories and Life

“Sanae was originally a ghost bound to room 106. And she received spiritual energy from two sources to maintain her body. From her real body, and from the ley lines near room 106.”

Sanae lived in room 106 and was somewhere between a living ghost and a bound ghost. In order to maintain her body, she received half her spiritual energy from her real body and the other half from nearby ley lines like normal ghosts.

“But in this year a change happened within Sanae.”

“A change!? I haven't changed at all!”

“Sanae changed from a bound ghost to a possessing ghost attached to Koutarou.”

“A possessing ghost!?”

It seemed like Theia had understood what Kiriha was talking about and she was rendered speechless as her eyes opened wide.

“As a result, she began to gradually shift from the ley lines to Koutarou for her supply of spiritual energy. Up until now, it had been a very slight amount, so his biggest symptom had been stiff shoulders…”

“Oh yeah, Satomi-sama has mentioned his stiff shoulders for quite a while now…”

“He had me massage his shoulders several times.”

When a ghost possessed someone, symptoms like stiff shoulders and poor circulation would appear. And since Koutarou had been complaining about stiff shoulders for a while, the residents of room 106 could relate.

“But just a while ago it completely switched over to Koutarou.”

“Why!?”

“Sanae, that's because Koutarou become more important to you than room 106.”

To Sanae, room 106 was extremely important, as she needed to be there to wait for her parents to come back. But she had learned that her parents weren't going to return. And with that, the residents of room 106 became more valuable than the room itself, with the one most important resident to Sanae being none other than Koutarou.

“Well, yes I love Koutarou, but since I love him, I wouldn't try to kill him!”

Sanae was also aware that the person she loved the most was Koutarou. She couldn't believe that she was killing him.

“Sanae, your will has nothing to do with this. Ghosts possess what is the most precious item or person to them. That's why you are now possessing Koutarou. And that is the reason why Koutarou is dying.”

Sanae's will herself was unrelated to the fact that the very essence of a ghost was unable to exist without possessing.

Ghosts possessed things because of love, obsession, hate or the like. And their wills couldn't control that at all. Just like how humans breathe, ghosts possess and steal spiritual energy.

For a normal ghost, it wouldn't be that problematic. It would simply end with stiff shoulders or becoming somewhat tired. But Sanae's spiritual energy was simply too massive. And because of that, the amount of spiritual energy that Sanae needed exceeded what Koutarou could produce. And since her supply of spiritual energy from her real body was unstable, her reliance on Koutarou had increased. Which meant that Koutarou, who only had an average amount of spiritual energy, couldn't sustain her.

That was one of the reasons why Kiriha had kept the truth a secret. If Sanae learned that her parents wouldn't return to room 106, her list of priorities would change and would most likely end up possessing Koutarou. That's why she had to keep it a secret for as long as possible.

“T-Then, I'm going to kill Koutarou!?”

With her eyes overflowing with tears, Sanae pointed towards the unconscious Koutarou.

“That's right.”

In response, Kiriha's answer was short. But Kiriha suffered as she squeezed those two words out. It wasn't like Kiriha wanted Sanae to suffer.

“At this rate, both Koutarou and I will die… I don't want that! …But if I return to my own body I won't know who you are anymore… I don't want that either!”

It was already clear what she had to do, but she was still scared to do it. Sanae had to choose a future without any hope.

“Tell me, Koutarou, what should I do!?”

Sane jumped at Koutarou and pleaded for an answer. Having become helpless, she ended up relying on Koutarou. And that was why she was killing him. For good or for bad, Sanae needed Koutarou.

“S-Sanae…”

In response to Sanae's voice, Koutarou opened his eyes. His consciousness had returned, but he could only speak meekly.

“Koutarou! You're awake!”

“Yeah… I have been for a while… so I understand the situation…”

Koutarou had regained his consciousness around the time that Clan's examination had ended. His body ached and he had no strength, so he had been unable to move his body. But hearing Sanae's desperate shout, he couldn't stay quiet.

“Koutarou, what should I do? I don't want to kill you, but I don't want to lose my memories either!”

Koutarou should know the answer. Sanae asked him for the answer, running under a similar assumption children had that their parents knew everything.

Sanae… that's for you to decide…

But it wasn't Koutarou who knew the answer, so he answered her question with a question.

“S-Sanae… what kind of future do you want?”

During this short time he was able to move his mouth, Koutarou's expression distorted in pain. Sanae was stealing spiritual energy from him even now. Even with Signaltin's protection, all he could do was remain conscious.

“That's obvious! I want to have fun with everyone, eat food and play games! And I want to meet Papa and Mama! That's the kind of future I want!”

Sanae's wish was obvious. She wanted her everyday life to continue, and she wanted to meet her parents. But since she couldn't imagine both of those coming true as she was crying.

“Then… r-return to your body, Sanae.”

“If I do that, I will lose my memories! I won’t know who you are anymore!”

Sanae shook her head while large tears spilled from her eyes. Her memories of this year was irreplaceable to her. And she couldn't bear losing those important memories.

Memories and Life

“It will be okay.”

But Koutarou shook his head in return. And while desperately ignoring his pain, he smiled at Sanae.

“How!?”

“E-Even if you lose your memories, I… we, will definitely become your friends… We'll make sure your, everyday, life, continues…”

Even if Sanae lost her memories, her everyday life would continue.

Everyone would become her friend again, and they would take her to room 106, where they would play games and eat dinner together. By doing that, even if her memories didn't return, Sanae would get her desired future.

“Koutarou…”

Sanae hadn't imagined Koutarou's answer. Astonished, her eyes opened wide in surprise as she stared at his face. He was smiling despite his pain.

“Isn't that right, everyone?”

He then asked everyone who had been watching over the two for their opinion.

“That's right, Sanae! Don't think you can escape from our games just by losing your memories! Since you've started this fight, you have a duty to see it through until the end!”

Theia quickly agreed with Koutarou. It was a very Theia-like answer with a focus on her competitive spirit, but her feelings for Sanae were the same.

“Sanae-chan, let's watch the continuation of Love Love Heart together! I'll ask the cosclub to record the episodes which you might forget!”

Yurika cried just like Sanae as she answered. During this year, the two had always been together as they watched the magical girl anime. And Yurika didn't want to watch the series end on her own. She wanted to watch the ending together with Sanae no matter what.

“If you have something you want to eat, I'm listening, Sanae. I will prepare it for when you return to room 106.”

Kiriha knew what Sanae liked. She liked hamburgers and curry, dishes that children and Koutarou would like. But she still chose to ask Sanae what she would want. She wanted a promise between her and Sanae.

“Sanae-sama, it's just as everyone says. You will only lose your memories. The fact that you met us won't disappear.”

“Yeah, Sanae-chan! Even if everyone else hesitates, I would forcibly go and talk to you so relax.”

Ruth and Shizuka were the same. Their eyes were full of tears and they agreed with Koutarou's opinion in an attempt to fulfill Sanae's wish. The two loved Sanae as well.

“Ho-, we will wait, Ho-!”

“We love Sanae-chan Ho-!”

Even the haniwas joined in.

“…You two be quiet.”

“Mmmm Mmmm!”

“Fhm Fhm!”

Memories and Life

Since it looked like the mood was about to be ruined, Clan blocked the mouths of the two haniwas and dragged them to a corner of the room.

Am I feeling envious of that girl because I have grown?

While shutting up the two haniwas, she gently looked at the group.

“Everyone, thank you…”

Sanae wiped away her tears as she smiled. She was really happy to hear everyone talk to her like this. At the same time, she was incredibly sad that they would soon be parting ways. That's why regardless how many times she wiped away her tears, they wouldn't stop overflowing.

“I love you all too…”

The shared feelings of everyone related to room 106 had surfaced because of the danger to Sanae. Koutarou and the girls all loved one another in one way or another. And everyone in this room recognized that right now.

“Theia, I will definitely join in for the rest of the games.”

“I will be waiting.”

It might not matter who won anymore. The games they were playing were no longer more than a front and one of the bonds that tied them together.

“Yurika, I'll let you borrow you my Love Love Heart stuff.”

“I'll give it back to you right away when we meet again.”

“Yeah, please do.”

And there wasn't just one bond. There were bonds of all kinds between the residents of room 106. Watching anime together was one more such bond.

“Kiriha, I want to eat the food you're best at making.”

“Are you fine with that?”

“Yeah. I'm sure it will taste better eating something I'm used to eating.”

“Alright. Then I will make it.”

Because of their parting with Sanae, everyone noticed that they already considered each other irreplaceable, and that they prayed that their everyday would continue.

“Ruth, Shizuka, if I go away, I'll leave Koutarou to you. He gets lonely easily.”

“Leave it to us, Sanae-sama.”

“I will accept this responsibility as a landlord.”

And everyone would pray as they waited.

That Sanae would once again return to room 106.

“Karama-chan, Korama-chan, I love you two too. Let's play again sometime.”

“Ho-! Alright Ho-!”

“I'm so happy Ho-! It's a promise Ho-!”

“I said be quiet.”

“Mmmmf.”

“Mhmm.”

Memories and Life

Having finished saying her farewells, Sanae finally turned to Koutarou. After hugging him once, she slightly separated from him and spoke.

“Koutarou, I'm sorry for keeping you waiting this long while it hurts so much…”

“I don't remember raising you to be a rude girl who said her farewells quickly…”

“I don't remember that either.”

Sanae whispered to Koutarou and gently patted his face. As she did, all of today's events floated away.

When they had first met, Sanae had thrown Koutarou's luggage at him. But that was when Yurika showed up, and their fight was left unsettled. After that, Kiriha and Theia appeared and things got complicated. In the end, they all ended up living together. After that, all kinds of things had happened. Sanae was kidnapped, Theia wrote a manuscript, and the underground people even tried to invade the surface. Koutarou also vanished before quickly returning.

Sanae really loved that everyday life. Everyday ever since she had met Koutarou had been so radiant. While imagining losing all of that, Sanae trembled.

“I was planning on becoming a magnificent and ideal woman of a guardian spirit too.”

“And you did.”

Koutarou had been saved by Sanae several times. Both by her spiritual powers and by her very existence. That's why she was already a magnificent guardian spirit to Koutarou.

“No, in the end, I was just an evil spirit. I'm even killing you right now.”

“Evil spirits don't shed tears as they smile.”

Sweat ran down Koutarou's forehead. Sanae tried to wipe it away, but since she was a ghost, she had no physical body. She had a regrettable expression on her face as she smiled wryly.

“Ahaha, looks like I couldn't even become an evil spirit. In the end, I could only be myself.”

“That's right. But become the person you want to be.”

“…Yeah.”

Sanae had been a ghost up until now, and one could say that future was now lost. But Sanae would regain her own life. She could become whatever she wanted. If she wanted, she could even start a family. A life that wasn't that of an evil or guardian spirit spread out in front of her.

“That's right, Koutarou. I'll give this back to you.”

“Hm?”

“It's a charm. It's important to you, right?”

Sanae removed the charm she normally had around her neck and put it in Koutarou's hand. It was the family safety charm that she had been wearing ever since she had been attacked by evil spirits after getting kidnapped by the ghost hunters.

内安全

Memories and Life

“I gave you this.”

“You did… but I can't take this with me.”

Sanae would return to her body as spiritual energy, and when she does, she won't be able to bring the charm with her. That's why she was giving the charm back to Koutarou.

“So give it back when we meet again.”

“I promise.”

“Yeah.”

Koutarou held the charm together with Sanae's hand. He didn't want Sanae to go either. That's why he didn't want to let go of her hand. But he definitely didn't want her to die. Even if she were to lose her memories, as long as she was happy, he could endure the loneliness. That's why he let go off her hand and held onto the charm.

“Koutarou, could you promise me one more thing?”

Sanae wiped away her tears as she spoke. And with that her tears finally stopped.

“Absolutely.”

“If… I'm saying if. If I fall in love with you again… after becoming a human.”

“Yeah.”

“Would you take me as your wi—”

Sanae wanted one more promise. But she didn't finish her sentence.

“What's wrong?”

“Actually, I won't say it.”

Instead, Sanae smiled.

“I feel like making you promise that at a time like this would be really unfair…”

Her smile at this time wasn't a special smile of any kind, it was just her normal one.

But it burned into the minds of everyone who saw it.

Part 2

The uniting of Sanae with her real body took place in the Cradle, as with Koutarou's examination. The power supply was a problem, and carrying in the equipment would be hard. And they wanted Signaltin nearby as an insurance. Like so, Clan and Ruth managed to successfully coax the rest into accepting their plan.

“Are you ready, Sanae?”

Kiriha made one final check, and Sanae nodded firmly without hesitation.

“Yeah. I don't really want to, but Koutarou is in danger so do it right away.”

The real Sanae was put in a bed next to Koutarou, while the ghost Sanae was inside of a large glass container. The bed and glass container were connected by a large amount of cables with a device in between them. The device was intended to merge the two Sanaes together. Since the device had been hurriedly constructed, its design was far from refined. And because it would handle a large amount of energy, it's operation would be unstable.

“Nee-san, the trial run worked without a hitch. The spiritual energy generator has secured a regulated output.”

“Yurika-chan, are you okay with the procedure?”

“I think I will be okay.”

Stabilizing the unstable device would be Yurika's job. As Sanae's spiritual energy was returned, Yurika would keep it from dispersing and diffusing. Her role in this procedure was incredibly important.

The hunters were operating the device while Yurika stood next to them with her cane readied. Their preparations were already complete.

“Alright. Then let's start.”

“Understood. Generator connected, activating converter.”

On Kiriha's signal, the two hunters hurriedly began operating the control panel. The device responded by lighting up all kinds of lamps as various meter needles began moving up and down.

“Stabilizer control strength at 20, stabilizing is under process! Yurika-chan, we're counting on you when the control strength reaches 65!”

“Yes!”

Yurika held her cane while staring at one of the meters. Her job would start once it passed the halfway point.

“Good bye, everyone.”

Sanae waved her hand inside the glass container. Her body was being wrapped in a yellow light created by the device.

“Sanae-chan, just leave the rest to me! I will definitely protect you!”

Yurika boldly stated while clenching her cane. But she was still staring at the meter. She was aware of how important her job was.

“Thanks Yurika. Please do.”

“Yes!”

Memories and Life

Sanae was a little confused as to why she thought of Yurika as reliable, but she was several times happier. Seeing the normally useless Yurika work so hard for her sake, Sanae felt strangely impressed.

“Sanae-chan, I won't say goodbye.”

“Let us meet again, Sanae-sama.”

After Yurika, Shizuka and Ruth spoke in turn. The two would easily tear up and their cheeks were already wet. As they held back their urge to cry, they raised their voices and smiled at Sanae.

“Yeah. Come meet me. I will always be waiting inside of her.”

Since Sanae could see their auras, their feelings were conveyed. She responded with a smile of her own and nodded at the two.

The light enveloping Sanae grew stronger, and eventually her own body began emitting light. It was proof that her body was turning into spiritual energy.

“I'm sorry for not being able to make proper preparations, Sanae.”

Kiriha looked at Sanae inside the glass container with a sorrowful expression. She normally didn't show a lot of emotion, but she wasn't trying to hide her feelings this time. That was just how serious she was and how much she treasured Sanae.

“It can't be helped. If it wasn't for you, I would probably just vanish one day.”

Sanae had no intentions of blaming Kiriha. She knew that Kiriha had given it her all. If anything, she was grateful.

“So don't mind it. What you should mind is the menu for the next time we meet.”

“I will do just that.”

As the two smiled at each other, Theia stepped forward.

“Sanae.”

Theia's expression was sad but her eyes shone with a strong will. Even when faced with this adversity, she hadn't given up hope.

“There was a time when I was worried about being an alien.”

Theia and Koutarou were alien to one another. And the reality that the two couldn't become a normal couple had caused her to suffer.

“But I decided to forcibly overcome it. I realized that using the word fate to comfort yourself was the actions of a loser.”

“Theia…”

“So you too should forcibly overcome the fate of being a ghost and losing your memories and return to that room. I will be awaiting your return there.”

Theia was an alien, and Sanae was a ghost; the problem the two worried about was essentially the same. That's why Theia felt a sense of unity towards Sanae. She wanted her to walk down the same path as she had.

“Thank you. I'll do my best.”

Sanae felt the same way. That's why Theia's words filled her with courage.

“That's the way.”

“Yeah.”

And just as the two smiled at one another.

“Here we go! Encyclopedia! Energy Stabilizer – Modifier – Effective Time, Four Times!”

With her cane in hand, Yurika started her incantation. The needle on the meter was about to reach the area where control would become unstable.

Sanae's luminescence grew stronger as her body’s outline began to weaken. A large portion of her body had already been converted to spiritual energy. But Sanae wasn't in any pain. The device and Yurika protected her to the maximum of their capabilities.

“Koutarou, looks like it's time.”

“…This year went by in an instant.”

Koutarou managed to raise his body and face Sanae.

“Yeah, it was fun. I wasn't sure what was going to happen at first though.”

Koutarou and Sanae thought back to the day when they first met.

When Koutarou returned to his room, he found Sanae there. He had assumed that she had gotten in without permission and threw her out. After that, chaos ensued.

It was a meeting that left such an impression that it felt like it happened just yesterday.

“I hope we have another year like that.”

“That's obvious, right?”

Enduring his pain, Koutarou smiled at Sanae. Since Sanae was starting to merge with her real body, his pain was gradually weakening. Though that was a welcome happening, it also meant that his parting with Sanae was close. It was probably because of their bond that he wished to feel the pain a little longer.

“Yeah, I believe. So come meet me…”

“Yeah.”

When Koutarou nodded, Sanae who had been trying her best not to cry began shedding tears. She could feel that she didn't have much time left, that her time as herself was about to end.

“Everyone, thank you for everything up until today. And—”

Before long, that time came. The light grew stronger and everything blended in with the white light.

“I love you, Koutarou…”

The last thing Sanae could think of was that Koutarou's back was warmer than the light.

Having been turned into spiritual energy, Sanae ran through the cables of Kiriha's device while being protected by Yurika. But from Sanae's point of view, she felt like she was flying straight through a white world. And at the end of that world was her real body, waiting. Like a meteor attracted to gravity, she flew straight towards it.

After flying through the white world for a while, images began appearing around her. They were all memories of Koutarou and the others.

So much has happened…

The white world was filled with memories in an instant. It was like a photo album without any proper order to it.

“Say it with more love!”

“What does that even mean?”

When Sanae focused on the images she could remember what she felt at that time. Every single one of the images was an irreplaceable treasure to her.

Huh?

But at some point, she began seeing images that she didn't recall, even though she was part of them.

Could this be how I lose my memories!?

The images that Sanae couldn't remember crumbled like a sand castle. Sanae felt a sense of loss every time one of those images crumbled. She knew that the things that crumbled must remain intact.

No! No, no! Give it back! That's something important!

Her memories crumbled one after another. Sanae reached her hand out towards her remaining memories in a desperate attempt to protect them. With the intent to at least save one.

Why!?

But her fingers simply passed through the images. And her memories continued crumbling.

Don't disappear, I won't know who everyone are! Stay with me!

Sanae reached out to the Koutarou within her memories. However, those memories crumbled and disappeared. She only had a few memories left now. Her nearly unlimited memories were now so few in numbers that they could be counted. The world was turning white once more. And that reality scared Sanae. She felt herself losing who she was. It was a fear more terrifying than death.

I don't want this, save me, Koutarou, Koutarou!

As if trying to carve the vanishing memories into her heart, Sanae screamed out Koutarou's name repeatedly. Koutarou was now the only one of the residents of room 106 that she could remember. But she couldn't even clearly remember what he looked like. And then the last memory started crumbling.

Noooooooooooooo!

Sanae screamed. Losing her memories was an unbearable fear.

And then.

“…”

Sanae could hear someone's voice.

Eh… w-who…?

It was a voice that felt nostalgic somehow. And the voice strangely calmed her. But it was a voice that she hadn't heard before. Sanae looked around, looking for the owner of this voice.

“…”

Before she could find the owner, the voice reaches out to her once more.

I'll be fine? What do you mean!?

The words that reached her gave her courage. And when she heard that voice, her fear began fading.

Memories and Life

Ah!?

After Sanae had turned her head all over the place, she saw a red light in the direction she was headed. It was a gentle light similar to that of the rising sun.

Someone is there… that's…?

At the center of the light was a single girl.

When Sanae saw her face, she felt like she knew who this was. But Sanae had no recollection of meeting this girl. Just like the voice, it was someone she had no memories of. Sanae couldn't tell if that was because she had lost her memories, or if she didn't know her to begin with.

The girl had her hands in front of her chest, as if she was praying. She was wearing something similar to a kimono or a shrine maiden's outfit, but it was different from Japan's versions. It had a foreign, unique design to it. And what stood out even more than the outfit was the girl's hair. Her hair was pure white, but from time to time, the colors of the rainbow would appear in it.

Several globes were floating around the girl. All of the globes were about the size of a volleyball, and were made of a transparent material like glass. Each and every one of them was glowing in a different color. Seeing that, Sanae remembered the set of paint of twelve different colors that she had used in elementary school. There were less globes, but their vivid colors reminded her of her paint.

What do you mean that I'll be fine?

Sanae spoke to that mysterious girl. She wanted to know more about her own future rather than the girl right now.

"…"

The girl moved her mouth and answered Sanae's question, but she was too far for her voice to reach. But her intentions reached Sanae's heart.

There are several approaches available to read the information recorded in a spiritual structure… I don't understand what you're saying at all! Use simpler words!

"…"

The girl obliged to Sanae's request and used a simple expression.

Love is all? I can understand that, but, I already knew that from the start!

Sadly, the girl wasn't able to clearly explain to Sanae using words she could understand. As a result, Sanae didn't understand why the girl had said that she would be fine. But her conversation with the girl strangely enough calmed her down and eased her fears.

But thank you. Thanks to you, I feel a little better.

As Sanae thanked the girl, she was given a happy smile in return. Sensing that gentle smile, Sanae calmed down and began wondering who the girl was.

By the way, who are you? Are you a new ghost?

Sanae didn't really have a clear intention of learning who the girl was. It could just be considered small talk.

"…"

However, the response to her question exceeded Sanae's expectation by far.

You're an invader of room 106!? And the first and last!? W-Wait a minute, what does that mean!? Hey!

Memories and Life

Despite having lost almost all of her memories of Koutarou and the others, Sanae could tell how bizarre the girl's response was. Wanting more details, Sanae raised her voice.

But before the answer could reach her, she had reached the end of the white world. Her few remaining memories disappeared, and her will flew towards the something that had attracted her. Because Sanae's fears had been alleviated everything proceeded smoothly.

"…"

After seeing Sanae off, the mysterious girl smiled once more before leaving that world. Any more help would be unnecessary. She could keep her interference to a minimum. Everything else was up to Sanae. She knew very well that excessive interference wouldn't necessarily lead to a good result.

Thus, Sanae overcame a large amount of hardships and safely merged with her real body.

The Admitted Student, Higashihongan Sanae

Part 1

April 5, Monday

The student called Higashihongan Sanae was originally registered in class 1A along with Koutarou and the others. But before she could attend the entrance ceremony, her condition turned for the worse and it became clear that she would be unable to go to Kitsushouharukaze high school. As a result, her name was removed from the attendance record, and only the teachers knew of her existence.

But as of late, she had begun recovering and is now able to attend the school. She was given a test to determine her knowledge, and it was determined that she had to capability to keep up with the first years. Because of that, she was able to merge into the same class as Koutarou and the others as was originally planned, instead of repeating a year.

“…And like that, Sanae-san was able to safely return to my class. Everyone, get along now.”

The classroom was wrapped in a whirlpool of excitement after the class teacher finished her explanation.

“Uooooooooooo! Another cute girl has comeeeeeeeeeee!”

The excitement was mostly due to the boys. Because the girl known as Higashihongan Sanae had spent a long time in the hospital, she was small, thin and gave off a fragile impression. Since there hadn't been a girl like this in class before, the boys got really excited.

“U-Uhm, I'm Higashihongan Sanae, take good care of me.”

While bewildered by the boys’ reaction, Sanae politely bowed her head. The Higashihongan family was a distinguished family that had been protecting a shrine since the days of old. Naturally, Sanae had naturally learned proper etiquette because of this.

“S-So cute!”

“She's a different type from our girls!”

“I can't keep my expectations from rising!”

Sanae's moderate and calm appearance only gave further rise to the boys’ excitement. Seeing the boys’ reactions, the girls were sending them cold glances.

“How rude!”

“Really, transfer student or admitted student, this is always the reaction we get.”

“Any new girl is fine. It's just like the Maki-chan fever from a little while ago.”

Because of Sanae's appearance it seemed like a large rift had opened between the male and female students.

“Oka~y, everyone calm down!”

Waiting for Sanae's self-introduction to end, the female class teacher clapped her hands together in an attempt to quiet down the class. And waiting for her students eyes to turn back to her, she once again began speaking.

“Like I just said, Sanae-san just left the hospital. She is probably unused to this school, and her endurance might be a problem. That's why I want to choose a boy and girl to support her.”

Having been hospitalized all this time, Sanae didn't know a thing about Kitsushouharukaze high school. She hadn't even heard the explanation all first years were given, nor did she know where the classrooms were or what the rules of the school are.

The Admitted Student, Higashihongan Sanae

Having spent a large amount of time lying on a bed, her stamina was a problem as well. Since so little time had passed since she was released, her strength hadn't recovered yet. Her breathing would get a little rough just from climbing the stairs.

Because of these, the female class teacher believed that Sanae would need supporters to carry out her normal school life.

“Let's see, who to choose…”

The teacher looked over her students. That was when a few of the boys began their intense appeal.

“Me me me! I will be the male supporter!”

“You idiot, I'll be the one helping Sanae-chan!”

“I will help her change or go to the toilet!”

But the female teacher easily ignored their desperate appeals.

“Let's see… okay, Satomi-kun, could you do it?”

“Me?”

Having suddenly been called out, Koutarou answered with his eyes wide open. In response, the teacher nodded with a smile.

“Yes. From here I can tell very well. Amongst the strong children, you are the calmest one. Would you rather not?”

Amongst the class that was more or less shaken up, Koutarou looked to be the same as always. And with Koutarou's great strength, the female teacher believed he was the perfect pick.

“No way!”

“Why is it the traitor, Koutarou!?”

“Can't you give us a chance for once!?”

Of course, the boys were very unhappy.

“The 'Leave it to me' Blue Knight-sama, huh…”

“Hmm, well, it'll be okay if it's Satomi-kun.”

“Even if he's also an idiot, leaving it to him would be 100 times better than to those other boys.”

The girls’ reactions were mostly positive.

Koutarou himself had no real objections to supporting Sanae.

“Okay, I will do it.”

Koutarou nodded and agreed to the female teacher's request.

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

Seeing Koutarou agree, the class teacher smiled and began looking over the class once more.

“Alright then, as for the girl… yes, Aika-san, can I leave it to you?”

The female teacher's eyes stopped on Aika Maki.

“Aika-san, you were a transfer student yourself, so you should be able to imagine what kind of difficulties Sanae-san might have. Could you do it?”

Her decision wasn't just because Maki was a transfer student, but because she also got along well with Koutarou. The teacher believed that the supporters' teamwork would play a big role in ensuring a smooth school life for Sanae.

"I don't mind. I probably would have ended up helping anyways."

Maki smiled and agreed. Like the female teacher suspected, Maki got along well with Koutarou. Even if she hadn't asked, Maki probably would have helped Koutarou. But her motive wasn't just out of goodwill.

Alright… With this I might be able to understand Satomi-kun's situation a little bit…

Maki had noticed that a change had occurred in room 106. And the ghost that had always been next to Koutarou had now appeared inside of a living body. It was a situation that an officer of Darkness Rainbow who sought to steal the power of room 106 couldn't afford to overlook.

"Thanks, you're a big help, Aika-san."

Koutarou simply believed that Maki was helping out and he carefreely smiled at her without suspecting a thing. He felt it reassuring to have Maki, a former transfer student, helping him out.

"My help costs a lot, Satomi-kun."

"I wasn't the one who asked though."

"Fufu, I'll put on your tab this time."

Maki answered with a smile. Actually, by this time, she had already pushed away the convenience of Darkness Rainbow somewhere deep inside her mind. Right now, Darkness Rainbow was just an excuse for her. Maki simply didn't want to accept that her motive was 100% goodwill.

"Okay, could you take your seat, Sanae-san? Your seat will be between those two."

With the selecting of Sanae's support, this matter was settled for now. The female class teacher was going to leave the rest to the students.

"Yes."

Sanae nodded and started walking towards Koutarou and Maki.

Sanae…

The way Sanae had nodded was just the way Koutarou remembered, and he felt nostalgic of it. But the Sanae approaching him wasn't the Sanae he knew.

"Uhm, nice to meet you. Satomi-san, Aika-san, I look forward to working with you."

In the end, Sanae's memories didn't return.

Part 2

Roughly two weeks had passed since the two Sanaes returned to one. During that time, Koutarou and the girls waited for Sanae to return to room 106. But in the end, Sanae hadn't appeared until the new school term started.

According to the ghost hunters that had been tasked with investigating, after Sanae had awakened, she showed no traces of having the ghost Sanae's memories, and she had awoken as just the other Sanae.

The residents of room 106 knew that Sanae would lose her memories, but there was the hope that maybe, just maybe, she would remember them. They hoped that they might be able to catch a small glimpse of Sanae that had existed in room 106.

But they had been let down by that hope.

Sanae lost all of her memories of room 106 and appeared in front of Koutarou and the others like a normal girl.

During the break, Maki guided Sanae towards the women's toilet.

“This is the girl's toilets. It's in the same location on all floors.”

“Thank you. I'll remember that.”

In order for Sanae to lead a normal school life, the toilet will be the place she will find herself needing in most emergencies. She could take her time looking for the other places, but not with the toilets. Guiding Sanae here first was a considerate move from Maki who had been a transfer student herself.

And there was one more reason for why Maki had taken Sanae to the toilet first. That was because Koutarou would soon return. At their age, having a boy by their side while going to the toilet was uncomfortable, both for the guide and the guided. That's why Maki wanted to take Sanae here while Koutarou wasn't around.

Next, Maki took Sanae to drinking fountains, facilities and classrooms near the 2A classroom. Since they didn't have much time during their break, Maki decided to leave it at that for now.

“Hey, I've gotten it.”

After Maki had finished her tour for now, Koutarou appeared in the hallway carrying a cardboard box in both hands. He had climbed the stairs from the floor below and smiled when he spotted the two.

“Good job, Satomi-kun.”

“Thank you, Satomi-san.”

Maki and Sanae smiled back at Koutarou. There was a reason why the two were giving him their gratitude. Actually, Koutarou had gone to get the course material for Sanae in her place.

Sanae didn't have the course material she should have gotten during her first year at school. This included things such as a map of the world and musical instruments. Because there was quite a bit of course material that continued seeing use after the first year, Koutarou ended up getting it for Sanae.

“What were the two of you doing?”

“I was giving her a quick tour.”

“I still don't know left from right yet after all.”

“Of course, it's only free because it's the first time.”

The Admitted Student, Higashihongan Sanae

“Hey, keep it free for Sanae-san.”

“Sure thing. But in return you'll have to pay, Satomi-kun.”

“As if I would!”

“Like I said, I'll put it in your tab.”

While Koutarou and Maki were arguing about paying, Koutarou pulled out a badminton racket and a dictionary sticking out from the box. The racket was getting in his way and the dictionary was poorly balanced and about to fall out.

“You greedy bastard.”

“Fufu, a bond with money is never cut, that's why I love it.”

“…Could it be that the two of you are going out?”

Because of Sanae's unexpected words, both Koutarou and Maki's eyes opened wide at the same time. And they denied what she said at the same time as well.

“Me!? And Aika-san!?”

“Me!? And Satomi-kun!?”

““No way, that would never happen.””

Though they had used different names, they spoke in harmony.

“Is that… so?”

Sanae tilted her head in confusion. Looking at the two argue, Sanae couldn't imagine them being anything but lovers.

While the two threw bitter comments at one another, they showed a casual kind of consideration. And the two were in perfect sync. They didn't look like normal classmates at all.

On top of that, there was one more reason for why they looked like a couple to Sanae. And that was the mysterious power she had recently developed.

That's strange, normally people like this are lovers…

About half a month ago, she had suddenly overcome the unknown disease that had plagued her for many years. And at the same time, she began seeing strange things. She could see a glowing white haze surrounding people.

At first, Sanae assumed that it was an aftereffect of her disease. When she consulted a doctor, she was told it could be an effect because of her long-term disease and was told to watch its progress for a while. That's why she had assumed it was an aftereffect. But after a few days, she realized that she could control whether she saw the haze or not.

After that, Sanae had observed many people using that power. It was the perfect way to kill time for someone who had just recovered from her sickness and was still weakened. As a result, Sanae realized that the haze she was seeing was related to life and mind.

The haze was thicker around young people and grew weaker as they aged. It also grew thicker the more intense their emotions got and vice versa. She also noticed that the haze had a tendency to gather around the area a person was paying attention to. This was particularly noticeable in sports and martial arts, as a kick or punch would come flying where the haze was gathered.

The property of the haze gathering where people are focusing indirectly taught Sanae about human relationships. For instance, when it came to lovers or parents and children, their haze

was always densely surrounding the other party. And since Koutarou and Maki had been the same, Sanae assumed that they were lovers.

It's only been a few days since I've become able to see the haze, maybe something is different…

Sanae didn't think of it any further than that.

The ability to see the haze was an odd power to begin with, and there was still a lot she didn't know about it. For example, she would sometimes see haze gather where no one was around. She didn't understand her power well enough to pass a clear conclusion.

And right now, there was something that worried Sanae more than her power.

“Having Aika-san as my girlfriend would cost me an arm and a leg.”

“There's no girl that doesn't take money, geez…”

“I can take my time to find one.”

“…Satomi-kun, you could just say that you'll earn a ton of money in the future… I keep saying you can put it on your tab… geez…”

“Hmm? Did you say something?”

“Nope, nothing at all♪”

While joking around, Koutarou and Maki walked side by side. While staring at them from behind, Sanae found herself unable to take her eyes off Koutarou's back.

Why does it bother me so much…?

And as she stared at his back, she was overcome with an urge to embrace it, to the point where if she let her guard down she might really do it.

I've never heard of love at first glance with a back…

Just before, Koutarou had said that Maki wasn't his girlfriend. Then, it might not be too bad if she became his girlfriend instead. While Sanae thought like that, her heart throbbed as she imagined herself hugging Koutarou's back.

Distant Days

Part 1

April 12, Monday

A week had passed since Sanae came to class 2A. By now, Sanae had already started to blend in.

“Sanae-chan, what do your parents do?”

“Uhm, we're an old shrine family… so Papa is the chief priest.”

“So you're the daughter of a distinguished family!?”

“…I wouldn't say that… It's not that famous of a shrine…”

When she had first come to the class, Sanae only spoke to Koutarou and Maki, but as time passed she was able to commune with various people. As a result, people began gathering around Sanae during breaks. Her youthful appearance and pure personality tickled a lot of people's desire to protect her.

“In the end, Sanae-chan didn't regain her memories…”

While looking at Sanae who was being surrounded by a large group of people, Yurika mumbled to herself. Next to her were the residents of room 106. They had gathered to chat during their break, but since nobody unrelated to them was around, they naturally began speaking about Sanae.

“I am sorry. Our power wasn't enough.”

Kiriha looked at Sanae as well as she furrowed her brows into a sorrowful expression. Kiriha had spent a long period of time trying her best to treat Sanae, but she had been unable to protect her memories. Looking at it objectively, there was nothing that could be done, but Kiriha still felt responsible. That was why she was the one who most likely wished for Sanae to regain her memories more than anyone.

“There's no need for you to blame yourself, Kiriha-san. If it wasn't for you, Sanae wouldn't have survived.”

Shizuka comforted Kiriha who was getting depressed. Kiriha had been the one that saved Sanae's life.

It was because she had extracted information from the ghost hunters and developed a way to treat Sanae while keeping relevant information a secret that Sanae was alive today. Had she made a single wrong decision, Sanae probably would have died, or Sanae could have ended up killing Koutarou. That's why not a single person blamed her.

“It's not certain that she won't get her memories back yet. It's still too early to feel sorry for yourself.”

“I think so too. It's only been three weeks.”

Compared to the others, Theia and Ruth remained optimistic. They would feel bad if Sanae didn't regain her memories, but they firmly believed that she would. They were capable of such a strong belief because of the difficult life they had lived.

“Will Sanae-chan's memories return?”

“If we don't believe in it, who will? If we leave her be like this, the Sanae who was crying back then won't be able to rest in peace.”

“You're right. I got a little weak, you've opened my eyes, Theia-dono.”

“Very good.”

“That's right, we have to get Sanae-chan's memories back at any cost!”

“Yurika-sama, please lend us your power.”

“I understand! This unworthy Nijino Yurika will do her best!”

Theia's optimism spread to her surroundings and smiles returned to the group. One could say that Theia's nature as a leader was starting to bloom.

“But, but, what should I do specifically?”

Yurika tilted her head. She understood that they wanted her to make her memories as a ghost resurface, but she didn't know exactly what to do.

“Would it work if we hit her with electricity or make her take some medicine?”

“Yurika-chan, you've been reading too much manga.”

Shizuka smiled wryly at Yurika's extreme ideas.

“Then, what should I do?”

“Uhm… that's…”

But even Shizuka didn't know what to do.

“…There's nothing we have to do.”

Koutarou who had been staying quiet until now was the one to answer Yurika's question.

“What do you mean, Koutarou?”

Theia asked him in place of Yurika. Koutarou responded by smiling at the girls.

“We can just stay the same. Talking to Sanae, and fooling around. Similar stuff like that will probably reawaken her memories.”

In order to reawaken memories, they only had to recreate the environment they had been previously in. And when similar things happen, she would notice that she has experienced them before.

“That said, that would be hard right now. It would probably be best once the attention around her dies down a little.”

Koutarou pointed towards Sanae as he said that. She was currently surrounded by classmates and she didn't have the time to be with Koutarou and the others. Once more time has passed and the class began calming down, Sanae should be able to have the time for that.

“And her wish was to live like that. Whether she has her memories or not doesn't actually matter.”

Sanae's wish was to spend her life like always. In that case, it wouldn't matter if she had her memories or not. What was important was that Koutarou and the others protected that promise.

“Satomi-kun, could you come over here?”

Just as Koutarou finished his explanation, Maki who was next to Sanae called him over.

“What!?”

Koutarou approached her without hesitation.

“…What a magnificent man…”

Distant Days

Theia praised Koutarou while staring at his back as he left. Koutarou entered the circle surrounding Sanae and began talking with the people there. Shortly thereafter, Koutarou, Maki and Sanae smiled. Sanae's smile was bright.

“He understands the path he should walk and he travels it without hesitation. His everyday life ever since we came might have trained him to behave as such. However—”

Theia understood Sanae's wish and that Koutarou wanted to fulfill it.

But her expression turned dark. She stared at Koutarou's back as if she was witnessing something sad.

“He doesn't desire Sanae, huh…”

Kiriha finished Theia's sentence. She was looking at Koutarou with a dark expression, just like Theia.

“Yes…”

And Kiriha had correctly guessed how Theia felt.

“He is gentle to everyone. His love is poured equally to everyone, even more so than the Blue Knight of legend.”

“Your highness…”

Reacting to Theia's words, Ruth showed a faint smile.

More so than the Blue Knight of legend.

To Ruth, the feelings put into those words held immeasurable emotion.

“He never asks for anything back. That might be fine for a lot of people. That is what the knight's philanthropy was originally about.”

Theia's words were supposed to be words of praise. But for some reason, Theia's tone and expression turned darker.

“But… for him not to ask anything of even those close to him is very sad…”

Theia ended her words there, but there was actually a continuation. While fiddling with her golden hair, she continued the sentence in her mind.

Even more so for a woman…

She wanted the person whom she loved to need her, to desire her. That wish held true in any world. Theia believed that was how the girls around Koutarou felt. But that wasn't important for now, so Theia put her feelings away before continuing to speak.

“The person over there is the person that was supposed to be our Sanae. Yet, why doesn't he wish for her to be our Sanae? To me… it looks like he is fine with Sanae staying the way she is as long as he fulfills his promise.”

That was what was important. To Theia, Koutarou's actions seemed strange.

Koutarou put in an extraordinary amount of effort to fulfill Sanae's wish, but he didn't seem to care if Sanae fulfilled her own promise of regaining her memory.

Because of that, their relationship didn't seem equivalent. It was if Koutarou didn't need Sanae. And Theia couldn't consent to that. She couldn't imagine Koutarou being such a cold man either.

“Why is he so easily accepting his parting with Sanae? Why doesn't he desire others? Why doesn't he say 'Come back?’ Just what is he so scared of!?”

Distant Days

There should be some kind of reason. But since she couldn't see it, Theia suffered while containing her emotions she couldn't unleash. She couldn't get angry, forgive or sympathize.

“There is something I can think of.”

The one to answer Theia's doubt was Kiriha.

“Really?”

“Yes. Based on the Koutarou I know from the past and from his actions up until now.”

This wasn't something that one could easily share with others. But Kiriha believed that the girls of room 106 held similar feelings as she did, so she decided to tell them.

“I understand where you are coming from, Theia-dono. I thought of the same thing for a long time as well. And why only Yurika is an exception.”

“Eh? Me?”

Yurika was taken back by surprise. She hadn't expected that she would be involved in something this serious.

“Koutarou doesn't ask anything from anyone, except for Yurika. They wrote manuscripts together, did their homework together, tried out wrestling moves and so on. Doesn’t that sound familiar?”

“…Now that I think about it… I always end up with the painful and troublesome things…”

Yurika placed a finger on her lap and thought about it, it did sound familiar. Whenever Koutarou would start something for fun, he would always pick Yurika. The wrestling moves a few weeks ago was one such example.

“But, isn't that just because Satomi-san is bullying me? He's not treasuring me. Ah, he also extorts me using food!”

Yurika only thought of it as punishment games. She could always come up with a few reasons as for why Koutarou would be angry with her.

“That's what I thought as first as well. But… when I thought back of Koutarou's past, I feel like I could understand why only Yurika is special.”

When combining what Kiriha knew of Koutarou's past and what Kii knew of her Onii-chan's behavior, a different reason surfaced. That's what Kiriha had recently noticed.

“Satomi-kun's past? Now that I think about it, Satomi-kun doesn't really talk much about himself.”

Shizuka loved gossips, but she knew when she shouldn't be playing around. And when it came to Sanae and Koutarou, she was always serious. That held true this time as well as she seriously participated in the discussion to come up with a solution to the problem.

“It's not that he doesn't talk about it, he just doesn't want to. After all… his mother was involved in a traffic accident and died right in front of him and his family collapsed.”

“Wha… what…”

Ruth held her breath. Koutarou's past was far more horrific than she had imagined.

“His mother died when he was six years old. Koutarou accidentally stepped out on the road, and when he was about to get run over, his mother pushed him out of the way… Koutarou witnessed his own mother die in front of him because of his own carelessness.”

The detailed information about the accident was a result of Kiriha's investigation in the past.

Distant Days

When she first came to room 106, Kiriha had gathered information on Koutarou in order to turn the battle for room 106 into a long term conflict, and that included information about his family.

She decided to leave the information be as it was something best left untouched. Since they were the same age, she had decided that it was a coincidence that the same thing had happened to her first love. But now that she knew that Koutarou was that same person, it served to explain the meaning behind Koutarou's actions.

“And because of the loss of his mother, his relationship with his father turned sour. That's why it seems like Koutarou has been alone since childhood. It seems like Kenji and baseball were what helped him get back on his feet.”

“So that's why Satomi-kun loves Mackenzie-kun and baseball…”

Hearing about Koutarou's past, Shizuka started understanding the strange relationship Koutarou and Kenji had.

Regardless of what cruel tricks they would play on each other, they would have completely forgiven each other the next day. They deeply trusted one another. Though it was slightly different from Yurika, Kenji was another exception for Koutarou. And the reason for that was found in his past.

“That's probably why he's good in a fight too…”

These days, children rarely fought hand to hand. And it wasn't hard to imagine what kind of childhood Koutarou must have had to be good at it. When Yurika thought of that, she could feel as if her chest was being squeezed.

“This is just my guess but… Koutarou is probably afraid that the people he loves will go away just like his mother. That's why he doesn't desire anyone, why he doesn't take that step.”

Theia's eyes shot open.

“What… No, if that's the case then…”

“And that is why he always minds the people around him. So that his carelessness won't cause something irreparable.”

Kiriha's guess sounded convincing to Theia.

The experience of having lost his mother was what made Koutarou to turn out the way he did. Scared that he will lose someone truly precious to him, he doesn't try to get too close to anyone. And because his mother had died because of his carelessness, he sticks to his promises with an adamant will and prays that all those around him will reach a happy conclusion.

Koutarou's actions weren't out of love, but from loss. When thinking of it like that, everything began making sense.

“That's why only Yurika is an exception!?”

“That's right. I'm from the underground, you are an alien and Sanae was a ghost. It was clear that we would eventually part ways. So Koutarou took one step back from us.”

Theia and Ruth would eventually return to Forthorthe.

Kiriha would also return underground one day.

Sanae would have supposedly passed on to the afterlife.

Shizuka was the other party of a temporary lease contract, Harumi had a chronic disease and would graduate in the near future. Koutarou couldn't imagine meeting them after his graduation.

Like such, all of the people around Koutarou were people that he would eventually part ways with.

“But Yurika is different. To him, Yurika is just a normal person. They could spend their high school life together, graduate and their relationship could continue after that. To Koutarou, Yurika is a person that will always stay close to him.”

“Now that I think about it, Satomi-san—”

Hearing what Kiriha was saying, Yurika remembered what Koutarou had said in the past.

“It's selfish, right? I probably just wanted you to remain as a normal classmate. A normal classmate, with a special hobby.”

That was several months ago when Yurika and Maki had fought. Having learned that Yurika was a magical girl, that was what he said. It was thanks to Kiriha's explanation that she could understand his real intentions. Before, she had only understood the meaning on the surface, but now she was able to reach a deeper place of understanding.

It's not that Satomi-san doesn't believe that I'm a magical girl! He wanted to believe that I'm a cosplayer! Because he should be able to stay friends forever with a cosplayer! A cosplayer wouldn't go away!

Of course, at first Koutarou didn't think much of it. But as he got along better with Yurika, he began feeling happy that she was just a cosplayer.

His mother had suddenly vanished. The other invaders would eventually leave. But Yurika was just a freeloader with a strange hobby. She might have been a little sloppy, but Koutarou's carefree everyday life with Yurika would continue forever, just like with Kenji. He wanted it to continue, that was the wish he kept secret on the inside.

And Yurika remember one more thing that he had said.

“Sunshine and rainbows suit you better.”

Just like before, they were words Koutarou had said to her in the past. Yurika had always interpreted those words as Koutarou saying that fighting didn't suit her. But after listening to Kiriha's explanation, they came to hold a different meaning.

T-Then Satomi-san is treating me roughly and bullying me because he really treasures me and… he thinks of me as sunshine and rainbows…

To Koutarou who had suffered over losing his mother, a problematic little sister like Yurika was a grateful existence. If what Kiriha was saying was true, then Koutarou took care of Yurika, but he was in reality relying on her.

“Then, uh, that's, ehm, really!?”

That was when Yurika's thoughts ground to a halt. Her blood started boiling and her face turned red. She blanked out and was unable to think of anything. Of course that was only obvious; up until now, Yurika had never been truly needed by someone. Nana, her master, might barely have been able to fit that description. But even Nana didn't plan to keep Yurika by her side forever. She always warned Yurika of the dangers and tried to push her away. But now, Yurika had learned that Koutarou needed her. And it wasn't just some superficial meaning, but an actual deep one, just like how he had trusted in her abilities as a magical girl, during Sanae's treatment a few weeks ago.

In other words, while Yurika was unaware of it, Koutarou thought highly of her skills as a magical girl without finding out that that was her true identity, and at the same time he thought of her as necessary.

Distant Days

Most likely, if Koutarou had known that Yurika was a magical girl from the start, this probably wouldn't have happened. The results of coincidence and inevitably crossing paths caused Yurika to become special to Koutarou.

When she realized that, Yurika became unable to think of anything. Realizing how blessed of a situation she was in, she became unable to control her emotions.

“So Satomi-sama doesn't think he will always be with us…”

While Yurika had overheated and became unable to speak, Ruth mumbled with a depressed expression.

Looking at Koutarou and Yurika's relationship from another perspective, it meant that Koutarou believed that the other invaders would eventually leave. And that was a horribly lonely reality for Ruth.

“That's right. That's why Koutarou has accepted that Sanae has lost her memories of us. After all, he has always been ready for the day that Sanae leaves.”

“Sanae-chan is important, but he was prepared for them to part from the beginning. That's why he's not shook up, even if she doesn't have her memories. He won't try to think of ways to forcibly get them back. That's kinda… sad, Satomi-kun…”

Since Shizuka didn't have any parents either, she understood Koutarou's feelings. She knew, better than anyone, what being truly alone was like. To Shizuka, Koutarou and the invaders had saved her from her solitude. That's why hearing that Koutarou was ready for his parting with Sanae from the beginning made Shizuka sad.

“But, knowing that, there's a way to approach it.”

The mood started to turn darker and more depressing, but Theia's eyes kept their gleam. Having decided on the path she would travel, she wouldn't stop at just grieving.

“We only need to make Koutarou believe that the time to part ways won't come.”

“How?”

If possible, Shizuka wanted to do what Theia was saying. Just like how she had been able to enjoy every day, she wanted Koutarou to be able to do the same. But coming up with a method for that wasn't easy. Shizuka followed Koutarou with her eyes while racking her brain. That's why, if Theia knew the answer, she wanted her to know it.

“Kiriha, I'll let you explain the details. You would surely know.”

But in reality, Theia didn't really know the answer either. All she knew was that Kiriha would have reached the answer.

“Leave it to me.”

Kiriha showed a small smile and nodded.

“…There's nothing we have to do.”

And she spoke the same words Koutarou had spoken just before. She believed that Koutarou's solution regarding Sanae would fit for him as well.

“We can just stay the same. Talking to Koutarou, and fooling around. By doing that, Koutarou will surely believe that we will always be with him.”

They would only repeat their everyday life until Koutarou believed that. A year might not have been enough, but there was still time. They would make Koutarou believe that they wouldn't leave, and if for some reason someone was still about to leave, they would join hands and prevent it. They would make him realize that together, they can protect their bonds.

Distant Days

“Like Yurika-sama?”

Ruth looked at Yurika who was still unable to think. Ruth found the thought of everyone bothering Koutarou like Yurika unbearably amusing.

“No… it doesn't necessarily have to be the same way as Yurika's. We are using our own ways to invade Koutarou's heart.”

There were as many answers as there were people. Yurika's method wasn't the only correct one.

“I'm not trying to invade though.”

Shizuka understood what Kiriha was trying to say, but she thought it was strange that she was treated like one of the invaders. But it's not that she disliked it.

“Sanae-san does it for free, but Aika-san makes you pay…”

“Hey, Satomi-kun, that's a rude way to put it!”

“That makes it sound like I'm a cheap girl.”

Unaware of the invading girls’ plans, Koutarou continued chatting with Sanae and the others. Looking at Koutarou, Theia raised the edges of her lips.

“Kukuku… you just continue to laugh carefreely like that, Satomi Koutarou.”

Theia then crossed her arms, threw her head back and showed a coercive smile while looking down on Koutarou. It was a smile that made one remember Theia when she had first come to Earth.

“You've made a grave misunderstanding if you think our invasion will end eventually. Just you watch, by the time you notice, it will already be too late… kukukuku…”

But since her feelings were obvious to everyone looking, unlike one year ago, nobody tried stopping her.

Part 2

At this time, it wasn't just Koutarou and the others who were paying attention to Sanae's memories.

“It looks like her memories really aren't returning… Ahahaha, this is my chance, the time I've been waiting for has finally come!”

It was the female evil spirit that was targeting Sanae and the others. Waiting for the perfect timing to attack Sanae, she had secretly been staying nearby all this time.

“If I have a body that can produce that much spiritual energy, I can surely return to the world of the living! This time, I will possess that girl and obtain her spiritual energy and body!”

The evil spirit was after Sanae's massive spiritual energy and her body that produced that energy. But there was little to no meaning in reaching out for them when Sanae was split into two.

The ghost Sanae was pretty much untouchable because of the spiritual protection around room 106. And since she was almost never alone outside of room 106, there was nothing the evil spirit could do.

As for Sanae's real body, because the majority of her spiritual energy had been separated from her body, she had grown weak and there was no point taking her over to use as a tool for producing spiritual energy.

But with both Sanaes united, the problems were all resolved. Sanae left room 106, and her spiritual protection grew weaker. Now, with her spiritual body back, Sanae's body was producing massive amounts of spiritual energy. This was the perfect time for the evil spirit. If her memories were to return, Sanae's spiritual protection might grow stronger again. And, since the two Sanaes had just united, her spiritual body still wasn't fully stable inside of her real body. So if the evil spirit were to enter, it wouldn't be hard to take over Sanae's body. It was her best and last chance. The evil spirit had no intentions of letting it pass by.

“Just you wait, little kitten! This time we will become one!”

The evil spirit’s hatred and envy flared up and burned her remaining spiritual energy.

She wasn't considering the future.

Since she was growing weak herself, she wouldn't get another chance if she passed this up. That's why she would use up all of her powers in an attempt to obtain Sanae.

Love is All

Part 1

April 12, Monday

Sanae was casually walking down the road by the riverside. Since she had just been released, she walked home from school in an attempt to build up her stamina.

Since the day was about to grow colder, there were many people on their way home walking down the same road as Sanae. Sanae observed the haze around people passing by her while indulging in thought.

I wonder what that was about …

She was thinking about the haze.

Through her mind's power, she was able to see a mysterious haze around people. Because the haze would change depending on the person's intentions, Sanae had become able to somewhat read a person's feelings. And there was something regarding that on Sanae's mind; that was the strange feelings that a few of her classmates had towards her.

Class 2A that Sanae had joined warmly welcomed her. While it could not be said for everyone, the majority of the class was friendly with Sanae. But amongst the class, there was a handful of classmates that held a different emotion about her.

The first one she noticed was Koutarou. Since the atmosphere around him was different from the others, Sanae first thought he liked her as a girl. But after observing the class for a little longer, she realized that there were others who held similar feelings as him.

The mature Kurano Kiriha, Kasagi Shizuka who had an older sister aura to her, Nijino Yurika who was easy to approach, and the two international transfer students Theia and Ruth. Adding in Koutarou, there was a total of six people who held a different emotion towards her.

Why do they have such feelings towards me…?

Upon further observation, those six held similar emotions towards one another as well. It appeared that those feelings were something the group had towards one another. But if that was the case, Sanae couldn't understand why those feelings were directed towards her as well. Before she came to this class, she had never met them, and she couldn't think of a reason for why they would feel that way about her.

And that feeling itself was a mystery. When walking around the city, she hadn't seen another group with the same kind of feeling. Though the feeling was similar to the feelings lovers and married couples shared, to families and to sport teams, it was still different from those feelings. It might be a feeling that had all of the mentioned incorporated into it. Either way, it was a feeling Sanae hadn't seen before.

But, I don't hate it…

Sanae didn't know the reason, nor did she know what kind of feeling it was. But she was happy that such a feeling was directed towards her. She felt that emotion the strongest when staring at Koutarou's back. During those times, she had the same feeling as the group of six, but she hadn't noticed that herself yet. That's why she looked at the people around her even now in search for an answer.

“…Huh?”

That was when Sanae saw something. The road she was travelling passed under a steel bridge, but she could see a haze swirling in the darkness underneath.

“What is that I wonder?”

Love is All

All she could see was the haze, there was no one nearby. Sanae had seen strange haze like this a few times before.

“I can see it awfully clearly today…”

But the atmosphere around it was different from normal. The ones she had seen before were much vaguer, but she could clearly see this haze in front of her. And she was able to clearly read the feelings of that haze.

Hate, envy, grudge, anger, grief and despair.

All kinds of negative emotions were contained within that haze. The moment Sanae felt it, she instinctively edged back.

What is that dark thing!?

The moment Sanae screamed on the inside, the dark haze looked at Sanae. The haze didn't have eyes, but Sanae could feel like it was watching her.

“I've been waiting for youuuuu!”

Along with the feeling of dark desires, a joyous shout filled the area. When that voice reached Sanae, a strong sense of fear made her cower. However, it didn't seem like the people around her had noticed the shout. It was as if only Sanae could hear it.

I have to run! That is surely something bad!

Sanae swiftly made up her mind.

However, having just been released, her body wasn't as fast as her mind. So Sanae panicked because her legs weren't moving at all and ran away from the place.

Part 2

Having finished his club activities, Koutarou was heading home as the sun was starting to set. After seeing Harumi, who took a bus home, off, Koutarou headed home alone. Because the school Koutarou and the others attended was on a small mountain, the way home was a long downward slope. While casting a long shadow, Koutarou descended the slope at a quick pace.

Koutarou was alone because he was almost the only one leaving the school at this time.

In the morning, he left Corona House with Shizuka and Kenji, and he would meet up with Theia and Kiriha on the way. Yurika would often oversleep, so they would meet in the classroom. After spending the day together, they temporarily split up after school for their various club activities and other businesses. They would meet up again in room 106 for some tea before dinner. And after that, they are always together until it's time to go to bed.

Therefore, the short time Koutarou spends heading home was his only true personal time. But it wasn't as if Koutarou did something special because he wasn't with the invading girls, and he also didn't think of the girls as a nuisance. If anything, one could see that Koutarou could let his guard down a little.

“…My stiff shoulders really did get better…”

Koutarou rotated his arms as he mumbled. Just a little while ago, his stiff shoulders had been a big problem. That had been because Sanae had possessed Koutarou. Ever since Sanae had returned to her body, his shoulders had started to recover. Now, he couldn't feel it at all unless he rotated his arms like this.

“I wonder what was better, having my stiff shoulders heal or having Sanae massage them everyday… No, Sanae was able to meet her parents. I guess the answer is obvious…”

Back when his stiff shoulders had been terrible, Sanae had given him daily massages. With Sanae gone, his stiff shoulders and massages stopped. Koutarou felt that was sad, but inevitable. He also felt that he should be happy that Sanae was able to return to her family again.

Thinking about it, Sanae was originally a ghost, and the only ending for a ghost was to pass on. If she had been a normal ghost, she would have passed on the moment she met her parents. Compared to that, the current situation was much better. She was now living together with her parents that she so desperately wanted to see, and Koutarou also knew that she was doing fine.

All that was left was for Koutarou and the others to protect their promise they made with Sanae while waiting for her memories to return, but Koutarou thought that that was wishing for too much.

The girl who was once a ghost had been revived; that alone was already an unbelievable miracle, so Koutarou wasn't planning on asking for any more miracles than that.

“Sanae is living her life happily, that is good enough…”

Koutarou's true intentions leaked through his mouth. The only time he would speak what was really on his mind was when he was alone. He would never say that in front of the girls who waited for Sanae's return.

Koutarou's intentions were just what the girls had imagined. He didn't wish for Sanae to return to how she used to be. But that was because of his feelings of resignation when it came to human relationships that his mother's death had caused, and not the convenient excuse of wishing for too much that he used himself.

“We'll get used to it eventually. Both me and everyone else…”

Love is All

Scared of losing those he truly needed, Koutarou never actively desired anyone. Because of that, he wouldn't have to get hurt, but those around him couldn't be unhappy. He couldn't repeat the same mistake again.

That was Koutarou's way of thinking brought about by his mother's death and by a big fault in his character. But at the same time, that was what gave Koutarou his great mental fortitude, or as the invading girls would call it, his lack of needing anyone. That's why it was a problem not so easily solved.

“Hm?”

Once Koutarou had reached the bottom of the small mountain his school was on, a lone girl passed by him on an intersection.

“Is that… Sanae?”

She was slightly more mature than the Sanae that Koutarou knew, but still retained her young appearance. Since he was just thinking about Sanae, he could quickly distinguish her.

“Did something happen?”

Sanae was heading in the opposite direction of her home. On top of that, she was running, despite still being under rehabilitation, and she kept glancing at something behind her. These three conditions caused Koutarou to suspect that something might be wrong.

“Alright!”

Koutarou quickly ran after Sanae. She had disappeared around a corner, but it wouldn't be hard for him to catch up to her while running.

Love is All

Part 3

Sanae was running out of breath and her heart was beating faster and faster. There wasn't a long distance from the road she had been on to where she was now, but since she had just been released, even that short distance was very hard on her. She couldn't catch her breath no matter how much she breathed and her heart was frantically sending oxygen through her body. She had sweat on her forehead and her mouth was wide open in an attempt to get as much air as possible. It was quite clear that she would collapse if this continued for much longer. This problem would of course solve itself if she stopped running. But she had a reason for not being able to do so.

“I-It's still chasing me!?”

When Sanae looked behind her, her expression distorted even further. That distortion wasn't from the pain of running, it was actually from the fear of what was following her.

“Wait! I just want to get along with you!”

Something unknown was behind Sanae in the shadows created by the setting sun. It seemed like that something wasn't stepping out of the shadows, so it was chasing after Sanae through the darkness. And so Sanae continued to desperately run because she didn't want to get captured by that unknown thing.

“I, have to get away! T-The sun, will set soon!”

The unknown thing wasn't stepping out into the light, so Sanae hadn't been worried about being captured. But before long, the sun would have completely set, which would mean that Sanae would be surrounded by darkness, and that would put Sanae within that something's reach. Sanae didn't know what would happen if she was captured, but she instinctively felt it was dangerous. That's why she had to escape while the sun was still up.

“You only just got better, you shouldn't push your body like that. You should take better care of yourself~. That's my body too you know.”

“It's getting closer! What should I do!?”

Sanae started to panic.

It was thanks to the fact that the something chasing after Sanae always stayed in the shadows that she had been able to keep away from it. But as the sun set, the shadows got longer and bigger, and that something began being able to move more freely. The distance she had gained on it shrank, and now it was maybe ten meters away from her. Sanae wanted to escape while the sun was still up, but the chances for that seemed low now.

“It looks like it's getting bigger and bigger!”

What made Sanae panic even more was that the presence of the thing chasing her was getting bigger. At first she had assumed that the small presence was just getting closer, but then the presence would have been approaching far too fast. If her sensation was correct, it had already grown several times larger than when she first encountered it.

“Fufufu, just a little more… just a little closer!”

“At, this rate, I'll be captured! B-But, what can I do!?”

Sanae was helpless. She knew that things would not turn out well if she was captured by the mysterious existence that had suddenly attacked, but she couldn't think of a way to escape from her situation. In fact, this was her first encounter with a paranormal phenomenon.

“My, breath… *cough*, *cough**cough*”

Love is All

Sanae desperately continued running down the residential area as the sun had almost fully set. But that was when she finally reached her limit. Her breathing turned rough, she felt dizzy and her legs were exhausted and couldn't move well. Eventually, Sanae's legs got tangled, and being unable to regain her balance, she fell towards the asphalt.

“Kyaaaaaa!?”

Her body crashed into the asphalt and she felt pain all over. The pain had cleared her mind up, but she couldn't move for the very same reason.

“Are you already done, little kitten!?”

That was when the black presence approached her. Its body had indeed grown larger like Sanae had sensed. Just a little a while ago, its movement would have been restricted by the sun, but since the sun was now on the verge of passing by the horizon, it could head towards Sanae at full speed.

“I have waited for this day for so long, little kitten! This time, we will become one!”

The presence spread out in front of Sanae who was unable to get up. And what appeared in front of her was a malformed giant.

The giant was formed from a human base, but with no thought put into its design. It was a strange appearance that looked like clay had been randomly placed around the body. The face alone had remained unchanged; keeping the face of a normal human actually made the giant even more eerie. with the expression of that face making it even more so. The sunken eyes were filled with all kinds of negative emotions, and its mouth seemed to be distorted by malice.

Looking at its appearance, Sanae could only think of one thing, as probably would anyone else.

“M-Monster!?”

More appropriate words to explain the giant couldn't be found.

“How rude! If I'm a monster, what would that make you with that ridiculous amount of spiritual energy!?”

The monster reached out towards Sanae with its several meters-long arm. Still unable to get up, Sanae had no way of evading that arm. No, it probably would have been impossible even if she was standing. The arm was simply too large and moving too fast. Faced with the giant arm closing in at an unavoidable speed, Sanae finally resigned herself to her fate and closed her eyes.

“That's obvious!”

But just before the monster's arm was about to reach Sanae, somebody jumped in and punched that arm with all their might.

Love is All

Love is All

“She's a magnificent and ideal woman!”

The punched body part exploded.

“Gyaaaaaaaa!?”

The explosion was far from large, but it caused severe pain and a large shock for the monster, which created an opening.

“Eh?”

Sanae, who had her eyes shut, opened them once she heard the explosion and scream. When she did, that person was now right in front of her.

“Let's go, Sanae!”

“Ah…”

In the next moment, Sanae was lifted up and held in the person's arms.

A large body with well-trained muscles, the warmth transmitted through the uniform and those resolute eyes.

The moment Sanae felt that she instinctively held onto that person's neck.

“Be a good girl and hold on tight!”

“…Satomi… Koutarou-san…?”

Sanae had only been able to tell who that person was after she already had her arms around his neck.

Love is All

Part 4

Having saved Sanae from the giant monster, Koutarou continued running while carrying her on his back. He had indeed saved her, but he hadn't defeated the monster yet. Even now, it was still chasing after them. He needed to find a place where he could finish the fight with the monster, but the middle of the urban area with a ton of bystanders around was not a good place to do so. Yurika could cast a barrier to ward off people, so at the worst he would have to fight in a place where the damage would be limited, and after meeting up with Yurika.

“I got it! The construction site in the suburbs, right!?”

“Yes! It seems like Yurika's spell can just barely be cast around the site! And because it's under construction, there's a metal fence as well! It's the perfect place to fight!”

Theia's voice came from Koutarou's bracelet. Using the bracelet he had gotten from Clan, Koutarou had contacted Theia. And since Theia was in room 106, the other invaders were all gathered as well. After Koutarou explained his current situation, Kiriha came up with an apt plan while Ruth swiftly looked up a suitable vacant lot. There, Koutarou and Sanae would meet up with the invader girls, have Yurika cast a barrier to ward off people, and then they would defeat the monster with their combined force. That was the plan Kiriha had come up with.

“Theia, tell Kiriha that the enemy is the ghost woman from that one time!”

“I got it, I'll tell her! And pleb!”

“What!?”

“I will leave Sanae to you! Protect her no matter what!”

“As you wish, my princess!”

With those words as his last, Koutarou ended his transmission.

“Alright!”

Koutarou then changed the direction he was running in, following the marker projected into his sight by his bracelet. Since the bracelet had received the coordinates from Ruth, Koutarou started running towards the construction site using the shortest path possible.

“I'm telling you to wait! You shitty brat!”

Having changed his direction, the monster behind Koutarou caught up a little. Noticing that, Koutarou sped up his tempo.

“Hang on, Sanae!”

“Kyaa!?”

Because Koutarou was running so fast, Sanae was surprised and lost her balance. In order to not get shaken off, she desperately held on to Koutarou.

What, is this…

After finally stabilizing her body, Sanae noticed the speed at which Koutarou was running, and her eyes opened wide in surprise. Koutarou was easily running past bicycles. And a car that was driving down the road couldn't quite lose Koutarou as it stopped at the traffic lights. His running speed at this time was far above 20 kilometers per hour.

If Koutarou had been on his own, that might be possible. It was possible for an athletic student to run at this speed on his own for a short distance. But Sanae couldn't imagine that it was possible to run at such speeds for a long period of time while carrying another person. But regardless of whether she believed it or not, it was the truth of the situation. And the distance between the two and the monster grew larger once more.

Love is All

Koutarou was using spiritual energy to enhance his body.

Though it was growing weaker, Koutarou still had the ability to use spiritual energy. He reinforced his muscle power and increased the supply of oxygen to his body to keep exhaustion away. Even for Koutarou, running this fast on his own power was not possible.

“Satomi-san.”

“What's wrong? Did you get hurt?”

“No, that's not it… just who are you people?”

Sanae couldn't understand anything.

The speed at which Koutarou was running was abnormal, and she also didn't know how he had saved her. It seemed like he was more knowledgeable about the monster than she was.

And then there was Theia and the others he had contacted through his bracelet. Sanae knew that Koutarou and Theia and the others had a deep sense of trust for one another.

Adding the pieces of the puzzle together let Sanae imagine that Koutarou and his friends were people with mysterious backgrounds.

“Us?”

Koutarou stumbled for an answer. He couldn't find a single phrase that could be used to describe himself and the others. When they had first met, 'Invaders and their victim' had sufficed. But now, he felt like that explanation wasn't suitable anymore. Koutarou and the others had changed to something else a long time ago.

“Well…”

After thinking for a moment, Koutarou smiled.

“We are Higashihongan Sanae's merry friends.”

Koutarou couldn't think of another expression. Being so close right now, he felt like this was the most accurate description.

“Is that… related to why you are so kind to me?”

Koutarou and the other's actions towards Sanae wasn't that much different from the rest of the class. But the feelings in those actions were fundamentally different.

“Maybe. But let's leave that for later. We have to hurry on ahead as fast as possible for now.”

“Yeah…”

After that, Koutarou fell silent and focused on his running. Sanae held onto Koutarou with both her arms in order to not get in his way. She stayed quiet while swinging back and forth on Koutarou's back for a while, but after some time had passed, a certain feeling started squeezing her chest.

I… know this back…?

It was an odd sensation. Sanae had no previous experience of being carried on Koutarou's back before, but a sense of familiarity came over here as she leaned her body onto him.

His wide back, his warmth, his pulse. The sensation of when he moved his arms, and the sense of security she felt while swinging on his back. All of these told Sanae one thing.

There's no doubting it… I have been on his back before…

Though Sanae wasn't sure when or how often it had happened, as she swung on Koutarou's back, she became convinced that this wasn't her first time doing this. It was impossible, but

Love is All

Sanae couldn't help but think that way. Somewhere deep within her heart shouted out that this was where she belonged.

Higashihongan Sanae's merry friends…

As she swung on Koutarou's back, she began thinking that what he had said before might not have been a joke.

Part 5

When Koutarou and Sanae reached the construction site, there were no longer any human presence around. Since the sun had set, the workers were done for the day and had left the site. Ruth, who had chosen the place, had foreseen that much.

“Is Theia and the others not here yet?”

Jumping into the construction site, he looked around the area, but he couldn't see the friends he was looking for. Because the place where Koutarou had saved Sanae was closer than the Corona House, and because he had been running quickly, Koutarou and Sanae had gotten to the construction site much quicker.

“Satomi-san, it's coming!”

“What's wrong brat, done running!?”

Even worse, the monster arrived before Theia and the others did. The monster passed through the entrance gate and invaded the construction site. Its body had grown even larger than before and was now several meters tall. If the monster had an actual form, she could have easily destroyed the gate instead.

“That thing… Just how many evil spirits did she merge with before coming here?”

Koutarou had fought against this monster, or more accurately, this female ghost, in the past. Back then she had also merged with evil spirits and had grown larger. But her size right now was even bigger than back then. Using her last remaining spiritual energy, she had gathered as many evil spirits as she could. The reason she no longer kept her human form was because she had used up her spiritual energy and because she had gathered too many evil spirits. She now had so much power in her body that she couldn't even control herself. She wanted Sanae so badly that she was able to go so far.

“Guge, gugegege, brat! Things won't go the same as they did back then!”

The only thing that reminded Koutarou of her original form was her way of speaking. Her appearance and voice had already greatly deviated from a human’s.

“Sanae, please get off.”

“Okay.”

Listening to Koutarou's request, Sanae got off his back. She was a little reluctant, but her current situation didn't allow for her to do anything but listen to him.

“But… what are you going to do?”

“I will fight her to buy some time until help arrives.”

Koutarou had told Theia and the others that the enemy was an evil ghost. Kiriha should have a way of dealing with ghosts. Since Kiriha was close to her armory unlike the time at the beach, she could make use of the weapons inside.

The actual problem was how would Koutarou buy enough time for the others to arrive.

“That's impossible! That thing is incredibly dangerous!”

Sanae shook her head frantically, her slightly long hair swung left and right.

She didn't think there was any way to buy time. In fact, she wasn't certain that anything could be done, even if help did arrive. The monster held such great power within it that Sanae couldn't help but feel that way.

“Doing it, even if it's impossible, is what a man does. Besides, there's nowhere else to run.”

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The monster was standing in front of the exit. The sun had fully set. There was no longer anywhere to escape to. Even if it was impossible, Koutarou had to do it.

“B-But! You know–!”

Despite that, Sanae still tried to stop Koutarou, but she couldn't come up with a good way to put it. In truth, she already understood that there was nothing else he could do.

“Thank you for worrying.”

Koutarou smiled at Sanae.

“Ah…”

Koutarou was smiling, but his eyes were filled with determination. Sensing that, Sanae realized that she couldn't stop him.

“Ah, right, I almost forgot.”

Seeing Sanae so uneasy, Koutarou was reminded of the existence of an item. He reached into the pocket of his uniform with his hand.

“Here, take this.”

Koutarou pushed what he pulled out of his pocket into Sanae's hands. He hoped that it would alleviate her anxiety.

“This…”

The moment she looked at it, her heart skipped a beat. At the same time, some sort of memory popped up in her head.

“A… charm…?”

“It's blessed.”

Sanae had been given a small charm. It was a purple bag with words embroidered using a golden string. The words 'Family Safety' glimmered in the few rays of light.

What was that… I was about to…

In her hand was just a common charm. It had probably been purchased at some shrine for a few hundred yen. But the moment she put her eyes on it, Sanae was greatly shaken. She felt like she was about to remember something. But in the end, she never did, and she started feeling frustrated.

“Cradle, give me my sword.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

“Ah.”

While Sanae was distracted by the charm, Koutarou had stepped forward and stood in the way of the approaching monster. Seeing that, the monster's mouth distorted and sneered at Koutarou.

“Do you think you can do something, brat!? Last time I may have been defeated, but I am several times stronger now!”

In the past she had been defeated by Koutarou, but now she was ready for her own ruin as she forcibly gathered as much power as possible. Even if Koutarou produced the same attack as he had before, she was confident that she could easily defeat him.

“Yes, there is a limit to what just 'I' can do. I'm just a high schooler that knows how to fight a little.”

Love is All

Koutarou admitted to what the monster was saying. But he didn't take a single step backwards. With determination in his words he spoke to the monster.

“But 'We' won't lose. My friends are all exceptionally competent!”

“So what!? Who cares about your friends!”

“You should be able to understand! After all, you got your power from gathering a lot of evil spirits!”

As Koutarou shouted, he held his right hand out in front of him.

“Y-You impudent brat!”

With Koutarou's hand pointed towards her, the monster instinctively flinched. Sensing that the monster was scared of him, Koutarou shouted out loudly.

“Come, Signaltin!”

“Call sign confirmed, coordinate axis fixed. Commencing transfer of Signaltin.”

The moment the AI answered through Koutarou's bracelet, a black hole appeared in front of Koutarou's reached out hand.

“What is that!? Brat, what are you trying to do!?”

Koutarou's confident, dignified figure and the mysterious black hole overwhelmed the monster, and though she was supposed to have the upper hand, she began feeling restless. Through that opening, Koutarou grabbed a hold of the sword that had appeared in the hole in time and space.

When he did, the sword began emitting a dazzling light. The light filled up the construction site and temporarily made it look like it was midday.

“This light is the light from that time!? Then, that was this sword's power!?”

The monster, with the female ghost as its core, had seen this light before. In the past, her allies had been burned by this light and passed on, and she herself had lost a large amount of spiritual energy. Back then, the light had appeared when Koutarou threw his charm at her.

Though even if the light was the same, the amount being emitted now was far different. It shone several times more intensely than what she had seen before.

“Your Excellency, Blue Knight, this ship, the Cradle, will pray for your fortune and glory in place of the nation of Forthorthe.”

“…Thank you.”

The enemy was powerful and he was unarmed, but he had to protect Sanae no matter what.

In this situation, Koutarou couldn't be picky about his methods. Koutarou figured that Signaltin was the only weapon he had capable of affecting the monster. Even if he borrowed a weapon from Clan or Theia, it wouldn't have an effect on a monster without physical form.

Truth be told, he also wanted to call out the Blue Knight's armor. But Koutarou didn't think that the monster would wait long enough to let him put it on. He had to hold his ground with Signaltin alone.

Part 6

Seeing Koutarou take a hold of his sword, Maki who had been watching over the development all this time grabbed hold of her cane. She had been tailing Koutarou in order to learn of the situation in room 106. And as a result, she had reached this place before any of his friends.

There's that ridiculous amount of magical power again… But this time it might be a little tough…

Since Maki had experienced the powers of Signaltin firsthand, she understood this situation better than anyone else.

Since Signaltin was a so called magic sword, it could deal a lot of damage against opponents whom physical attacks worked on. Against opponents who used magic, it held matchless strength. But against a ghost, it was just a normal sword. Because of that, the surplus magic of the sword had to be controlled to cover the blade in order to fight, but Koutarou was not good at that and could only carelessly use the sword's magic power. Because of that, there was a lot of wasted magical power, which would also cause the power of the magic covering the blade to weaken.

Meanwhile, his opponent was a monster that had absorbed an abnormal amount of evil spirits and obtained a high amount of power. Though she was no match for Signaltin, she was still very powerful. Normally once something like that was done, control would be lost and the evil spirit at the core would collapse on itself, but her deep obsession made this feat possible.

Koutarou had a strong power, but couldn't use it to its fullest extent.

The monster had less power, but could freely use it.

Not even Maki could predict who would come out on top in this battle.

In the worst case scenario, I'll have to step in… but for now I'll cast a barrier to ward off people until Nijino Yurika gets here…

Maki began her incantation of a spell.

"Sanctuary – Modifier – Effective Area – Colossal."

As she did, Maki complained to herself.

Really… why am I in this place, helping Satomi-kun… I don't get it at all, geez…

It was a strange twist of fate. In fact, in the past, Maki had fought against Koutarou and the others in this place. Though the site had changed as construction continued, there was no mistaking it.

After that, the situation had changed and Maki stopped fighting Koutarou. Now she was even giving him a helping hand. It was a situation that anyone would find strange, not just Maki.

By the time Maki finished complaining to herself, her incantation had finished and its effect began taking place. Magical power enveloped the entire construction site and hid the situation within from the surrounding residents.

"You can do it, Satomi-kun… I will stay with you…"

Only Maki could see Koutarou after her spell.

It was truly strange.

She truly wanted to do so, and even felt that she had to do so, from the bottom of her heart.

Part 7

The fight went as Maki had predicted, and Signaltin was a poor match against an opponent without physical form. Koutarou's magic control wasn't good enough to overcome that poor match.

It would probably have been more than enough to defeat the ghosts that had captured Sanae last summer. And unknown to Koutarou, he was being backed up by Yurika's magic back then. But right now, Yurika wasn't here, and the monster in front of him was far more powerful than the one last summer.

“I was surprised when you pulled out that sword, but in the end it's just a sword! As long as I keep my distance, it's nothing!”

The monster floated and kept her distance from Koutarou while using her powers to attack him from afar. She made objects lying around the construction site float and sent them flying towards Koutarou. It was a paranormal phenomenon known as Poltergeist.

“Haah!”

Koutarou swung his sword to swat away the objects flying towards him. Iron, sandbags, nails, screws and the likes flew towards him, all dangerous objects. But fortunately, since they were all physical attacks, Koutarou could block them. He swung his sword to block the large objects, while using Signaltin's magic power to block the smaller objects with a defensive spell. He was barely able to prevent these attacks thanks to his body being enhanced by spiritual powers.

But that wasn't the enemies only attack.

“Come on now, are you sure you should focus on only doing that!?”

“Guhaa!?”

With his hands full blocking the Poltergeist attacks, something suddenly crashed into Koutarou.

As a result, acute pain ran through Koutarou's body and he was robbed of his physical strength and body heat. At the same time, his vision turned darker and he looked like he was about to lose consciousness.

That was the monster's other attack. While attacking Koutarou with her Poltergeist, she launched another attack from his blind spot. The attack sent from the blind spot was a ball made out of hardened spiritual energy. It was an attack fitting of a ghost as it stole life energy from whatever it hit.

“D-Damnit!”

Koutarou shook his head to clear up his mind, and that was when another wave of Poltergeist attacks assaulted him. Unable to move from his pain, Koutarou had no way to block them and ended up taking direct hits from several objects. Koutarou was wounded by the attack, but this wasn't the only one. He had been on the defensive for a while now because of this combination attack.

I can't keep up like this! I have to come up with something quickly!

After regaining his balance, Koutarou started blocking the Poltergeist attacks once more, but he already knew that this situation couldn't continue on for long.

Koutarou's sword couldn't reach the monster, while she could still attack him. Even if he focused on dodging the ball of spiritual energy, he couldn't distinguish it from the large amount of flying objects. On top of that, since a simple defensive spell couldn't protect him from the spiritual energy attack, he had no way of preventing it.

As a result, Koutarou had been injured by this combination several times and was gradually getting cornered. He was trying to buy as much time as he could in order for Theia and the others to get here, but he had started to notice that it would be very difficult.

“Satomi-san, that's enough, please! Just forget about me and run away!”

Sanae also knew that Koutarou was in a dangerous situation. There was more than one wound carved into his body, and all of them were deep. If he continued protecting Sanae, it was clear that he would be killed.

Of course, Sanae didn't want Koutarou to get hurt. She also didn't want the person that had been working so hard to protect her to die. And because she had learned of the warmth of his back, she couldn't bear to lose it.

If she had enough physical strength left, she would have surely run in front of Koutarou to protect him. But without any stamina left, she was unable to move. She hated the fact that all she could do was watch.

“Hehe, I-I can't just do that.”

Koutarou did his best to block the attacks while answering Sanae. But he wasn't looking at her. His hands were full just blocking the incoming attacks.

“Why!?”

“Because I am stubborn!”

Betraying Sanae's hopes, Koutarou didn't run away.

Even if she didn't have her memories, Sanae was still Sanae, and Koutarou couldn't abandon the girl he had been together with for such a long time.

Even if I die, I have to keep that monster away from Sanae until Theia and the others get here… And to do, that I have to buy as much time as I can!

It was fortunate that the monster's focus was on Koutarou. As long as it continued focusing on him, the chances of saving Sanae raised, even if it was just a little.

I'll leave the rest to you, everyone!

Koutarou foresaw his own defeat, but the reason he didn't retreat was because he believed in Theia and the others. They would be able to save Sanae. With that in his mind, Koutarou resolved himself to buy as much time as he could.

Since Koutarou had been prepared for his parting with the invaders, he didn't regret the fact that he himself might not be saved.

“Uooooooo!”

Koutarou shouted and pumped himself up as he readied his sword and charged. Based on what the monster had done until now, he was certain that she wouldn't attack Sanae, so he decided to close the distance between himself and the monster as quickly as possible. By moving around, the chances of an attack hitting him lowered and he was able to better attract the monster's attention. This was his last attack in an attempt to buy as much time as possible.

“You can't, Satomi-san! Don't do it!”

Sanae who could read other's feelings, understood why he had suddenly stepped forward.

“Wait! Please wait!”

Sanae firmly grasped the charm in her hand while desperately calling for Koutarou. But he didn't answer. He didn't turn back. And he continued to charge.

Love is All

He will die! At this rate, Satomi-san really will die!

All Sanae could do was stare at Koutarou's mysteriously warm back. When she thought that she wouldn't be able to feel that warmth anymore, she couldn't stay calm. That's why Sanae started crawling after him.

“Don't leave me behind! I don't want you to go!”

Koutarou was putting his life on the line for her. It was supposedly her first time experiencing that, but strangely enough it didn't feel like it. However, Sanae didn't have the time to clearly consider that, as she desperately chased after Koutarou. But the distance between them kept growing. The amount of wounds on his body kept increasing.

“You promised me! That everything would stay the same! And that we would always have fun!”

Driven by her intense emotions, Sanae shouted in a loud voice. She didn't even know what she was saying. But she desperately shouted to Koutarou who was leaving her, wanting him to always stay with by her side. She followed what her soul wanted, what her feelings wanted.

“So dying on your own is unfair! You have to keep your promise!”

However.

Unable to completely block it, a large chunk of iron crashed into Koutarou's body. Having taken the hit, Koutarou was sent flying. After flying back for a few meters, he crashed and rolled across the ground. Once he stopped rolling, he lay on the ground and remained unmoving.

Right in front of Sanae, something that was the same as the world ending, something that she couldn't accept, had happened.

“Koooouuuutaaaarooooouuuu!”

In that moment, Sanae's feelings leaked out. That changed the way she called his name and her voice filled the construction site.

But what overflowed at this time wasn't just her feelings.

“Wha!? What is this abnormal amount of spiritual energy!? Is this the little kitten's true powers!?”

An enormous amount of spiritual energy overflowed from the screaming Sanae. The center of it was her right hand. It was the 'Family Safety' charm that she had been holding in her hand.

The spiritual energy leaking from the charm turned into a dazzling light that even normal people could see, and it flowed from Sanae's hand into her body. Now, the dazzling light wasn't just being emitted from her hand but her entire body. The light continued to expand, and in the end, Sanae was standing in a pillar of light with a look of blank surprise.

“H…Huh…? I…?”

But once she returned to her senses, the light rapidly shrunk, as if it was being absorbed into her body. At the same time, the amount of spiritual energy she emitted returned to the same amount she normally did.

“That's right, Koutarou! What about Koutarou!?”

Sanae had been surprised by the light that had surrounded her and that it disappeared, but she soon remembered something more important.

“Koutarou!”

Sanae forgot what had just happened to herself and rushed towards Koutarou.

Just a moment ago she had been so weak that she couldn't even move. But now there was no sign of that whatsoever. Another strange occurrence, but Sanae didn't notice it at all.

Love is All

The monster stared at Sanae with wide eyes. Her eyes were already big, but the surprise enlarged them even further.

“Impossible… This is on a completely different dimension from what I saw in the summer… Not even a land god has this much power… It is quite clearly a class above that… I can't believe it… Just who is this girl…?”

Though temporarily, the amount of spiritual energy that Sanae had emitted was far too much. It had long exceeded the limits of man and was stepping into the boundaries of gods.

“Aha, ahahahaha! I want it, I will definitely make that body mine!”

Despite witnessing her power first hand, the monster didn't fear Sanae, and instead got even more excited. Her desires for what would happen when she got a hold of Sanae's power was greater than her fear, although that might just be the way an out of control evil spirit might think.

“As long as I get that body, I can become a goddess!”

As the monster was getting abnormally excited, she followed Sanae with its eyes. Now that Koutarou had been defeated, she was about to get its hands on Sanae. Sensing that the days of eternal glory was near, the female ghost at the monsters core couldn't keep her excitement hidden.

Love is All

Part 8

Having reached Koutarou, Sanae held up his large body.

“Koutarou, Koutarou! Please, wake up!”

As Sanae had been running, she was terrified that Koutarou might have died. That's why she shook him fiercely while her voice was breaking up.

“S-Sanae…?”

Koutarou slightly opened one of his eyes and looked up at Sanae who was holding him.

Fortunately, he was still alive. He was injured all over and he had taken a lot of damage, but he had somehow survived the previous attack.

“Koutarou!”

Sanae readjusted her hold on Koutarou and embraced him.

Koutarou hadn't died thanks to Maki helping him out, but Sanae couldn't care less about how he had survived. To her, there was nothing more important than that he was alive.

“Thank god, Koutarou is alive…”

The warmth she could feel as she embraced Koutarou was the same warmth that she sought for in the present and in the past. Tears began flowing down Sanae's cheeks, and she was so happy that she was able to feel Koutarou's warmth that she couldn't keep her tears from overflowing. The tears streamed down her cheeks and dripped down on Koutarou's face.

“I was, really, worried…”

“…Sorry.”

Koutarou reached up with his hand and wiped away Sanae's tear. Koutarou felt that tears didn't suit Sanae, no matter the kind.

“If you leave me again, you'll regret it. If you do leave again, I'll put you in my Scorpion Deathlock I practiced the other day!”

“Sanae, your Scorpion Deathlock still doesn't hurt that much… Wait, Sanae, why do you know that!?”

Noticing what Sanae was nonchalantly saying meant, Koutarou hurriedly rose up in surprise. He had been so surprised that he forgot about the pain of his injuries.

“Of course I know that. Did you go senile?”

Having been told that the technique she practiced wouldn't hurt, Sanae's response became a little more malicious. She still hadn't noticed what had surprised Koutarou so much.

“If you want, I can use it on you right now.”

“That's not what I meant. Did you get your memories back!?”

The ghost Sanae knew about the Scorpion Deathlock, but the hospitalized Sanae didn't.

And if the Sanae in front of him knew that, it must have meant that she had the memories of when she was a ghost.

“Eh…? Memories?”

Sanae blinked repeatedly. She had been so focused on Koutarou that she hadn't thought about herself at all. It wasn't until Koutarou pointed it out that she noticed the change that had taken place in her.

Love is All

“Y-Yeah… it looks like it…”

While surprised by her own change, Sanae nodded repeatedly.

Sanae's memories regarding Koutarou and the invader girls had returned. Right now, Sanae had her memories of when she was hospitalized and her memories of room 106 at the same time. It was a strange sensation having two sets of memories, but it wasn't as important as having regained her memories.

“I remember… Koutarou, it's Koutarou! We… we meet again…”

Tears formed in Sanae's eyes. And though Koutarou had just wiped them away, tears streamed down Sanae's cheeks again.

“Sanae…”

Koutarou was so surprised that he couldn't spit out any other words. His surprise was bigger than when he had learned that Kiriha and Kii were the same person. He had believed that he would never meet Sanae again.

“Sorry for interrupting your moving reunion… but it's about time to end this.”

But that was as much as the two were able to speak. They were currently in the middle of a battle, and their enemy wasn't going to wait for them to finish talking. This was the time for action, not words.

“I'll take that body of yours, little kitten!”

“Sanae, you get back!”

Koutarou placed himself in front of Sanae and readied his sword.

“No way!”

But the Sanae right now wasn't someone that only needed to be protected. Right now, Sanae had her love and courage that she had developed during her year with Koutarou and the others, and the perseverance that she had developed during her long-term hospitalization. She had evolved into a third Sanae, and that Sanae wished to be by Koutarou's back at times of peace, and by his side at times of emergencies. If anything, she wanted to protect Koutarou.

“I am happy you protected me, after all, I'm a magnificent and ideal woman.”

Heeding her desires, Sanae stood next to Koutarou. Her appearance was no longer weak and timid like before. Her exhausted body had been healed by spiritual energy, and her appearance as she stood with her hands on her hips exuded confidence, as if she was convinced of her victory.

“Sanae!? Don't be reckless, you're still—”

“Like I said! If you leave me again, you'll get the Scorpion Deathlock!”

Sanae was never planning on letting Koutarou leave her behind again.

That's because his back was for hugging, not staring.

And if he didn't understand that, Sanae was going to forcibly make him understand by using the hold she had learned.

“Little kitten, even if you have powerful spiritual energy, what can you even do? Just give up on this useless struggle and become a part of me.”

The monster sneered at Sanae. She had an enormous amount of spiritual energy, but Sanae couldn't freely use it all. And having only just returned to her own body, that ability of hers was

still unstable. That's why the monster believed that the Sanae six months ago might have been able to do something, but not the current Sanae.

“I can do anything! I can make any miracle occur!”

However, completely unlike what she had been just before, Sanae didn't flinch at all. She puffed up her chest, glared at the monster and clearly stated.

“That's because someone said so! That love is all!”

Sanae couldn't remember whose words those were, but she believed them to be the truth. The passion burning inside of her told her that she couldn't lose to this monster. She had no basis for that belief, but she was still convinced of it.

“Sanae, I have no idea what you're talking about.”

By this point, Koutarou had given up trying to convince Sanae.

Since the monster wanted to absorb Sanae, she wouldn't hurt her, and since Sanae could use spiritual energy far better than Koutarou can, she wouldn't get in the way.

“What, you're saying you can't trust what this Sanae-chan is saying?”

Even though there was a powerful enemy in front of her, Sanae spoke in the same way she did when taking it easy in room 106. She then leaned in towards Koutarou and swung her waist into him as a sign of discontent.

“No, I was only thinking that it's some great rock'n'roll.”

“Naturally!”

In that moment, Sanae's right hand began glowing white. Her spiritual energy was starting to focus into the charm. At first, the spiritual energy grew stronger and weaker in accordance to her pulse. But as she got excited, it eventually gained its own rhythm.

“A maiden always plays at eight beats.”

The name of the song is Love is All. The rhythm played at eight beats.

It was just a small band with just her and Koutarou, but Sanae believed they could obtain the world.

That world, was a mere six tatami mats big.

It was a very small world, but it held everything Sanae wanted.

Part 9

Once the fight restarted, Sanae began with giving Koutarou an unexpected demand.

“Koutarou, that sword won't do! Change it to your normal one!”

“What!?”

The weapon in Koutarou's hands was Signaltin, the strongest weapon he could use. It was thanks to this sword that he hadn't been killed by the monster's first blow. So having been told to change it confused Koutarou.

“The power in that sword is too strong, so my power can't pass through it! But your normal sword has your spiritual power permeated through it, so I can infuse it with my power!”

“I see!”

Understanding what Sanae was saying, Koutarou who was holding Signaltin with both hands let go of it with his right hand and reached it forwards.

“Blue Knight, give me my sword!”

“As you wish, my lord.”

The bracelet he was wearing was Clan's, but thanks to Clan and Ruth's underground dealings, Koutarou could send orders to the Blue Knight using the same bracelet. And his order was to transfer over Saguratin, his other sword.

“Come, Saguratin!”

“Call sign confirmed, coordinate axis fixed. Commencing transfer of Saguratin.”

The mechanism worked the same way as when the Cradle transferred Signaltin. A black hole opened up in front of Koutarou and Saguratin appeared from it.

“Master, this ship, the Blue Knight, will pray for your fortune and glory in place of the nation of Forthorthe. And Princess Theiamillis and Guardian Knight Ruthkania both await your safe return from the bottom of their hearts.”

The only difference would be the message given during the transfer. The Cradle had the voice of an artificial intelligence, but the Blue Knight had Ruth's voice. This was due to Ruth's meticulous nature.

“Like Ruth said, let's return safely!”

“Yeah!”

Koutarou nodded to Sanae and grabbed hold of Saguratin. Unlike Signaltin which he had only started using recently, Saguratin which he had been using for all this time felt just right in his hand.

“Let's go, Koutarou!”

The next moment, spiritual energy started flowing out of Sanae's right hand, turning into a torrent of white light that poured into Saguratin.

“I knew it! This sword will work!”

Saguratin that had been permeated with Koutarou's spiritual energy easily accepted Sanae's spiritual energy. Since Saguratin didn't hold any special powers, Sanae could freely infuse it with her own spiritual energy since Koutarou's own energy didn't reject it.

“We're good, Koutarou!”

As a result, Sanae successfully poured in an enormous amount of spiritual energy into Saguratin.

Love is All

“Alright!”

Koutarou started using not only Signaltin in his left hand, but Saguratin in his right hand as well.

Since Saguratin was infused with Sanae's spiritual energy, Koutarou could use it to easily fend off the monster's Poltergeist. His attacks didn't even need to score a direct hit as whatever came close to the sword was sent flying. It was almost like the sword had gotten a meter thicker. Not even Signaltin when covered in shockwave magic had this large of a radius.

“Sanae, with this I can put up a fight!”

Sensing that he's making progress, Koutarou instinctively smiled at Sanae.

“Fufu~n, and on top of that I can do this!”

Getting into the swing after being praised by Koutarou, Sanae turned her hands towards Koutarou. When she did, Koutarou's right arm moved on its own and swung Saguratin from right to left.

The swing produced a blade of spiritual energy. The blade continued travelling forward and knocked away a large amount of objects as it headed towards the monster.

“Gyaaaaaaa!?”

Not expecting this attack, the blade of spiritual energy scored a direct hit. The blade struck the monster's waist and forced many of the evil spirits that had gathered around that area to pass on.

“Guu, Guaaaaaaaa, w-what is that, that's just unfair!”

The monster summoned forth more evil spirits to heal the wound on its waist as it glared at Sanae.

Sanae's powers were far greater than what the monster had expected. She had assumed that Sanae wouldn't be able to do much, but she ended up suffering a major blow for her lack of caution. The monster's advantage of being able to attack from a distance had been easily overturned.

“Koutarou, that's how you use the Love Love Sanae-chan Sword.”

“…Sanae, you do the most amazing things so casually.”

Koutarou was amazed in many ways.

“But make sure you don't use the Sparkling Sanae-chan Cutter too much. Creating the cutter puts a little strain on you.”

“But I'm not sure on that name.”

When she had been a ghost, Sanae's spiritual powers had been quite impressive, but she was far above that right now. It was most likely because she had become one with her body, but her progress gave Koutarou quite the surprise.

“…With this, I'm probably better off with Saguratin. Cradle, reclaim Signaltin.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

After sending Signaltin back to the Cradle, Koutarou held Saguratin in both hands.

“Oh? You only need one?”

“Yeah. You should avoid doing things you're not used to in a fight.”

Love is All

Koutarou hadn't trained to use two swords, and since spiritual energy was more directly connected to the mind and soul than magic, Koutarou decided it would be best if he didn't split up his attention.

“What a waste. It looked so cool too.”

“I'll practice for it next time. Now then…”

Koutarou pointed the tip of the sword towards the monster.

“It's our turn now.”

Koutarou and Sanae had recovered their normal confidence, and the monster was starting to fear Sanae's powers. It was now clear that the fight was going to turn in their favor.

“As if I would let you!”

The female ghost that made up the monster's core had bet everything on this fight. Using up all of her remaining spiritual energy, she had summoned all of the evil spirits in the area and challenged Koutarou and Sanae to a fight. That's why she couldn't afford to lose. Even if she ran, she would eventually pass on as she had already used the majority of her remaining spiritual energy. Because of that, she couldn't retreat.

“You guys, give me more power!”

The female ghost forcibly extracted power from the evil spirits making up the monster's body, and attacked Koutarou and Sanae. Its method of attacking was the same as before, but it attacked with several times the numbers. She used her Poltergeist phenomenon to cause a large amount of objects to float and created several balls of spiritual energy that stole life force.

“Is she going on her final offensive!? Here she comes Sanae, stay on guard!”

“Koutarou, I will protect your back! So you just look straight forward and beat that thing!”

“I'll leave it to you!”

The relationship between Koutarou and Sanae was the opposite of the exploited evil spirits. They felt for, protected and supported each other. If there was someone there to witness the battle, they would surely have declared Koutarou and Sanae the winners at this point. In the face of a dangerous battle, their trust for one another became a power that surpassed all limits.

Love is All

“Sanae-chan special attack, Wonderful Arrow!”

Sanae began focusing spiritual energy into the 'Family Safety' charm in her left hand. As she did, the energy began taking the form of a glowing bow with the charm as its core. And when she drew the bow with her right hand, a glowing arrow appeared. Using her spiritual energy, Sanae was going to support Koutarou with a bow and arrow.

Sanae's real body had been part of an archery club during her middle school years, just like her mother. She hadn't been able to participate much as she had grown weak, but it was the easiest weapon for Sanae to imagine.

“Dieeeeee!”

Before Sanae could take aim, the monster attacked. It sent a large amount of objects towards Koutarou while attacking him with balls of spiritual energy from his blind spot.

“I'm the only one who gets to mess with his back!”

With a shout, Sanae let go of her arrow without aiming. Had it been a real bow and arrow, she would never have hit a thing. But since she was using a bow and arrow made out of her own spiritual energy, the shape was just an image to make her attack more clear. As the arrow flew through the air, it split into 18 smaller arrows that flew after different targets.

“Hiiit theeeeem!”

Sanae was aiming for the 18 attacks aimed at Koutarou's back. With her spiritual abilities she could sense all of those attacks. There was no attack that was easier for Sanae to sense than one based on spiritual energy.

The fired arrows were like guided missiles that drew beautiful arcs as they hit their targets. The 18 arrows had all successfully shot through their target. As a result, Koutarou's back remained unscathed as he continued his charge.

“Alright♪”

Satisfied with this result, Sanae called out to Koutarou.

“Goo! Right there! It's a home run!”

“Gooooot iiiiiit!”

Responding to Sanae's words, Koutarou swung Saguratin with all his might.

“I'll knock you out of the park!”

And the produced swing had a dynamic form that had enough power behind it to look like it would be a home run.

The large sweep created a gigantic blade made out of spiritual energy. Its size, thickness and speed were all above of what Sanae had created by controlling before. The created blade blew away the objects in a large area and created a path for Koutarou.

“Kuh, don't get full of yourself, brat!”

Of course, the path Koutarou had created led to the monster. And as a result, the blade of spiritual energy assaulted the monster.

“Haa!”

But since it had predicted this attack, the monster didn't take any damage. It controlled the balls of spiritual energy that it had created to attack Koutarou to crash into the blade.

The two attacks collided mid-air and unleashed their energies, creating a large explosion.

Love is All

“As if I'd let you beat me so many times!”

“Aww~, so close~! …but I guess I don't need a year's worth for that one.”

“No, it's not over yet!”

The next moment, Koutarou passed through the flames of the explosion and appeared right in front of the monster. He had thrown himself through the explosion, prepared to take some damage.

“Really!? Koutarou, you like old ladies!?”

“O-Oh no!?”

The monster didn't expect that Koutarou would take such an action so her reaction was too slow.

“How about thiiiis!”

With Saguratin raised above his head, he swung it down against the monster. Without any time to react, the monster had no way of avoiding the attack.

Koutarou's strike cut off the monster's right arm by the elbow. The arm vanished before it could fall to the ground, and the evil spirits that made up the arm passed on.

“Too shallow!?”

However, Koutarou clicked his tongue at the results. He had been aiming for the monster's head. Since the female ghost, who was also the core, served as the monster's head, Koutarou figured that if he had been able to strike it, the monster would go down in a single hit.

Koutarou's aim had been disrupted because he had jumped through the explosion. The blast had slowed down his body and the flames had blocked his sight, the result being that his aim was thrown off ever so slightly.

“Kyaaaaaaaa, my arm!”

Having had its arm cut off, the monster quickly retreated. It wasn't foolish enough to remain in place to allow for Koutarou to follow up with another attack.

“A-At this rate, I'll lose! In that case!”

The monster started falling back even faster.

“What? Is she aiming for a long distance fight? Or is she running away?”

Even if the battle turned into long distance shooting, Koutarou and Sanae wouldn't lose. Even if the monster ran away, the female ghost who served as its core was almost at her limit. The monster’s actions seemed illogical and Koutarou couldn't find a reason for it to retreat.

That's why Koutarou continued pointing his sword in the monster's direction while confusedly watching it.

“Aaah!?”

Eventually as the distance grew so big that attacks would no longer reach it, Sanae let out a bewildered voice. Her face was pale as she had figured out what the monster's plan was.

“What's wrong!?”

“Koutarou! She is going to eat the people outside to increase her power!”

Sanae who had sharper sense than Koutarou could tell what the monster was doing even from this distance, and that was that it had started to target the humans outside the construction site. That could only mean one thing: it would eat all nearby humans to increase its power before facing down Koutarou and Sanae once more. Its goal was to replenish its energy.

Love is All

“She is thinking that she can't win at this rate, and she also can't run away, so she's going to eat people to power up!”

“What!? That would be seriously bad!”

Koutarou hurriedly chased after the monster. The monster was already outside of his range. His attacks wouldn't reach from here, but before long the monster would escape from the construction site, and the chances of stopping her before she could go on a rampage on the outside was next to none.

Damnit, to think she would do something like that…

Koutarou regretted not being able to predict what kind of actions the desperate monster would take.

How many victims would there be? Ten? Twenty? Or even more?

Koutarou turned gloomy as he thought about that while chasing after the monster.

“There's no need to worry.”

That was when a familiar and powerful voice resounded throughout the construction site.

“Well done on enduring for this long on your own, my knight!”

The voice belonged to a girl Koutarou and Sanae knew very well, Theia. She was standing in a place a little further away from the two as she glared at the monster while proudly standing in a dignified manner.

“Theia!?”

Having spotted her first, Sanae let out a joyous voice. There were several other familiar people standing next to Theia as well. Ruth, Yurika, Shizuka, Kiriha and the two haniwas. The reinforcements from room 106 had finally arrived.

“Theia, what are you going to do!?”

Upon finding Sanae, Koutarou asked her what she meant.

“Koutarou, Sanae, you two continue chasing after her.”

But Theia didn't answer his question. Instead he was given an order.

“I got it! Let's go Sanae!”

“Yeah!”

Theia was no longer the kind of shallow girl that would ignore others. Because he knew that, Koutarou understood that Theia was pressed for time. That's why he didn't hesitate to chase after the monster.

“Yurika, stop her movements!”

“Okay! Quick Cast – Bind Undead – Modifier – Super Penetration!”

Yurika incanted a spell that prevented ghosts, zombies and the likes from moving. Magic tended to not be very effective against powerful undead creatures, and knowing that, Yurika poured more than enough magic power into her spell.

“Gah, my body!?”

The spell proved effective as the monster stopped midair. Yurika's magic power turned into a rope that had caught the monster and stopped her in her tracks.

“Could this be, t-the same as that time!? Which means—”

Love is All

The female ghost at the monster's core remembered this sensation of not being able to move her body. She had felt this same sensation when she had lost against Koutarou and the others last time.

“Here we go, Ruth, Kiriha, Shizuka! Prepare to attack!”

“I-It's them!”

The monster was barely able to move her eye to look behind her. Along with a clear sense of hostility, she spotted a girl with golden hair. Next to that girl were four other girls hurriedly moving about. The monster couldn't imagine that the girls had come to this construction site for fun.

“The spiritual energy sensor is activated Ho-! Ruth-chan, are you getting the data Ho-?”

“I'm getting it, Karama-chan! Data has been converted and inputted into the Blue Knight's fire control system! Your highness, we are ready!”

“Kiriha, how's it going on your end!?”

“The photon – spiritual energy converter has begun normal operation! Korama, how are the adjustments?”

“Shizuka-chan, we're counting on you Ho-”

“Uhm… something like this? Eii!”

“Nee-san, the output wavelength has been synchronized to Shizuka-chan's fighting spirit Ho-!”

“Theia-dono!”

“Good, here we go everyone! I don't want to see any blunders!”

The monster could see Theia's fearless smile.

“Hii.”

And upon seeing that smile, she shivered. Theia's face at this moment was one of clear hostility. It was the fierce and brutal expression of a royalty that had decided to eliminate her enemy. And while maintaining that expression, Theia gave an order to the bracelet on her right arm.

“Blue Knight! Anti-material laser cannon!”

“As you wish, my princess.”

In the next moment a black hole appeared next to Theia. It was the same kind Koutarou used when calling out his sword. But what appeared from the hole wasn't a sword, but a large laser cannon with a barrel several meters long. It was the largest size of laser cannons used by individuals, and because of its size, the user couldn't aim it themselves. It was a weapon that aimed on its own.

Love is All

Once the cannon had fully appeared, the two haniwas installed gold rings around the muzzle. After waiting for them to complete their task, Theia issued her next order.

“Output to maximum power! Firing mode to single-shot and set the irradiation range to high convergence! Give her your best shot!”

“Altering firing mode, adjusting range and focus. Retargeting in accordance to adjustments. Energy charging completed. Firing preparations are complete.”

“Fire!”

The moment after the bracelet announced that the cannon was ready to fire, Theia gave the order without hesitation.

“As you wish, my princess.”

Immediately after, the laser cannon converted all of the energy it had stored into photons and ejected it from the muzzle. In Forthorthe, standard issues lasers for attacking are purposefully colored to show that it is firing. The laser from this cannon was originally red, but what was actually fired from the barrel was white light.

The reason for the light's change in color was due to the girls’ cooperation. Karama's sensor picked up the monster, and then Ruth sent that data to the Blue Knight. The Blue Knight then used that data for its attack. The photons to be fired were changed into spiritual energy thanks to the devices installed into the muzzle. The converted spiritual energy was then synchronized to match the same wavelength Shizuka had when she would attack; so as long as it hit, even a spiritual body would take serious damage.

In other words, this was a weapon created out of the girls’ cooperation in order to defeat ghosts.

“Gyaaaaaaaaa!”

The monster let out a loud scream.

Having been changed from light into another type of energy, it wasn't a pure laser, but it still had overwhelming speed. By the time the monster saw the light leave the barrel of the cannon, it had already been hit. Having received a direct hit from an attack with the power of defeating the enemy inserted into it, the monster's lower half was completely erased.

The damage taken from this attack was so great that the monster lost the ability to stay in the air and fell towards the grounds of the construction site.

“Koutarou!”

“Yeah!”

The monster fell down right in front of Koutarou and Sanae. The two had headed there in the case that Theia's attack didn't defeat the monster. It was a splendid plan as the two rushed towards the monster to stop her.

“Uughh, why, why am I the only one who’s this misfortunate… Couldn't I, a-at least get a little happiness after dying…”

The monster was still alive. She had lost her lower body, but she crawled across the ground with her upper body.

“Koutarou, she's also…”

“Yeah. I know.”

The monster was still moving, but the female ghost controlling it had suffered a lot of damage from the previous attack. It was obvious that she would pass shortly, even if left alone. Even if she had been an evil enemy, Koutarou and Sanae couldn't attack her in that state.

Love is All

“Nobody… nobody cares about me… I am alone… and I will face my end alone… fufu, fufufufu.”

Before long, the monster was unable to move. The female ghost no longer had enough spiritual energy to order around the evil spirits.

“You're wrong. It won't end just because you die.”

Sanae approached the her. After squatting down next to her, she wiped away her tears.

“Little kitten…?”

“And you won't be alone. Somewhere out there. someone is watching over you. I know that.”

“Sanae…”

Koutarou felt a strange feeling inside of him as he watched over Sanae's conversation with the female ghost that was starting to pass on. Koutarou still thought of Sanae as a child, but right now, she was opening her heart up for someone else. It was an action overflowing with gentleness and was far from being able to be called childish.

“I don't, understand… but that's, probably why, I lost…”

The female ghost's body began emitting a faint light. Her outline weakened and her body gradually lost its shape. The time to pass on to the afterworld had finally arrived.

“Take better care next time, okay?”

Sanae smiled as she said that and wiped away the female ghost's tears once more. But since the female ghost's existence was weakening, Sanae couldn't touch her. And Sanae felt that was sad, it no longer mattered if the woman had been an enemy or not.

“Next time, huh… Will there be a next time for me…?”

“Of course. There's no way there won't be.”

The female ghost's body grew fainter and fainter and had almost disappeared. Only Sanae could see and hear her now because she was so sensitive to spiritual energy.

“You think so?”

“Yeah. I don't think this world's god is such a strict person.”

Sanae was convinced of that. If that hadn't been the case, she wouldn't have been able to reunite with Koutarou. Just being able to meet Koutarou again required several miracles, and that's why Sanae believed that this world's god was truly gentle.

“Fufufu… I, hope so…”

The female ghost disappeared, leaving behind a small laughter. Not even Sanae could tell if she had been saved or not. But the laughter she could hear at the end was far from empty. That's why Sanae decided to believe that the woman had been saved.

“Bye bye, ghost lady… let's meet again…”

Like that, the woman who had hesitated for so long passed on while being seen off by Sanae, whom she had after.

Love is all, huh…

And Koutarou was overcome by a strange sensation when he realized that Sanae was more mature than he thought.

Love is All

Part 10

After seeing the female ghost off, Sanae wiped her tears away with her hands and turned around to Koutarou who was behind her. Once their eyes met, she smiled. She felt that the battle was now over and was finally able to relax.

What, is this…?

However, Koutarou's was still feeling tense. Even though the female ghost had passed on, the evil presence wasn't going away. In fact, it was growing even larger.

“What's wrong, Koutarou?”

“Sanae, something's strange. Don't you feel it? This strange presence?”

“…Now that you mention it…”

Once Koutarou pointed it out, Sanae was also able to feel something strange about the presence in the area. And once she focused on that evil presence, she realized that it was by her feet.

“Koutarou! This is strange, the ghost lady has gone, but the monster's body isn't going away!”

The monster created by the female ghost was the identity of the evil presence. Its lower half had been destroyed by Theia's attack, while the female ghost who served as its head had passed on. Despite that, the upper body remained without disappearing, and its evil presence was growing ever larger.

“Sanae, just get back! It's dangerous!”

“Okay!”

Sanae hurriedly ran towards Koutarou.

The next moment, the monster's fist slammed into the ground where Sanae had been standing.

“What is the meaning of this!?”

There was no one left to control it, but the monster was still moving. It was a bizarre and mysterious sight. As Koutarou tilted his head in confusion, Sanae came running back to him. After putting Sanae behind him, he pointed his sword towards the monster's upper half that had begun moving again. However, the monster simply continued to crawl and roll in circles, instead of going after Koutarou and Sanae. It looked like it was just a coincidence that it had almost hit Sanae.

What's going on with that?

Sanae poked her head out from behind Koutarou and looked over the monster's upper body. By doing that, she was able to see the flow of spiritual energy inside of it. And the moment she saw that, she instinctively let out a scream.

“What is that!?”

The spiritual energy was so disordered it couldn't even be called a flow. Normally, there were flows of spiritual energy similar to blood vessels throughout the body, but the monster ignored that common sense and moved its spiritual energy in all directions. The monster's upper body crawled and rolled in accordance.

“What's wrong!?”

“Koutarou, there are too many evil spirits in that body and it's getting out of control!”

“Out of control!?”

It was a nightmare that the female ghost had unintentionally created.

Love is All

In order to fight Koutarou and Sanae, the female ghost had gathered a lot of evil spirits at the cost of losing her own body. And she had only been able to control that through her iron will. As a result, a normally impossible amount of evil spirits focused into a single spot and she obtained great strength.

However the woman had vanished before releasing the evil spirits. This left behind a clump of evil spirits forcibly merged to one another. That's why the evil spirits rampaged around in an attempt to escape from this constraint.

“The evil spirits in that body want to be released! But since they're forced into that shape, they can't get out! That's why they're all doing whatever they can!”

“So what's going to happen!?”

“I don't know! But, I don't think it will be pretty!”

Not even Sanae knew what would happen next. But if several hundred evil spirits forcibly clumped up continued to rampage on like this, it was clear that something bad would happen. Just the few invaders of room 106 had caused a great amount of commotion after all.

The ones to deliver the answer were the two haniwas that had flown to Koutarou and Sanae's side before they knew it.

“It will explode Ho-!”

“The pressure will continue to build until it blows up Ho-!”

They knew what would happen next thanks to the results of their sensors observational results.

“Explode!? Really!?”

“Tell us in more detail!”

Hearing that there would be an explosion, Koutarou and Sanae couldn't sit idly. They leaned forward and demanded an explanation from the haniwas.

“Assuming that the body has the standard strength for a high level spiritual body, I have calculated how big the explosion will be and how long the time we have left is by looking at the speed at which it gathers spiritual energy Ho-!”

“There won't be much physical damage Ho-, it'll only scorch the ground a little when it explodes Ho-!”

“That's all?… Then we can just leave it be.”

“Geez…”

Hearing that the ground would only get a little scorched, Koutarou and Sanae dropped their shoulders in relief.

“We can't do that Ho-! The effect of the spiritual body exploding will cause all life forms with spirits within a 300 meter radius to die Ho-! They will be hit by a shockwave of spiritual energy and their minds will break Ho-!”

All living creatures within a 300 meter radius were 100% guaranteed to die. After that distance, the fatality rate would gradually drop until there was no danger after one kilometer out.

“Explain that first!”

“Wait, wait, Karama-chan, how long until it explodes!?”

“Another two minutes and 23 seconds Ho-”

“Kyaa! Noooooo!”

Love is All

It was now night, and the citizens had come home by now. Evacuating all citizens within two minutes was impossible. It would be the worst tragedy since the foundation of Kitsushouharukaze city.

“Koutarou!”

That was when Theia and the others approached. They had also received the same information and were in a panic.

“Just how many hundred meters away would you be safe!? Even if we all run now we won't make it!”

“It's definitely impossible for me! I will definitely die!”

“I don't have much confidence either…”

“Kiriha, isn't there some way!? At this rate we're all going to die!”

“It's not like there's not a way but… it's difficult.”

The only one not panicking was Kiriha. But even her expression was a serious one. The chances to escape from this situation were low.

“Tell us!”

“We need to force all the evil spirits composing this body to pass on before it explodes. By doing that, the spiritual energy will naturally diffuse in the process.”

“Is that even possible!?”

“It's not possible for me. If anyone could do it, it's Sanae.”

“Noooo, I just became a human again, I don't want to die— Eh, me?”

Noticing that she had become the subject of the discussion, Sanae stopped moving.

“That's right. Karama and Korama's spiritual energy weapons don't have enough power to force that many evil spirits to pass on. But with your powers, it is by no means impossible.”

“Sanae-chan, could you triple the amount of spiritual energy you put into Koutarou's sword Ho-?”

“If you can, we have a chance Ho-, we will amplify your powers Ho-!”

“Three times that? Hmm… I won't know unless I try.”

Sanae furrowed her eyebrows. The amount of spiritual energy needed was on the line where Sanae wasn't sure if it was possible or not.

“But I have to do it, right?”

“That's right.”

Kiriha nodded firmly. And in response, Sanae nodded back.

“Okay, I'll give it a try! I am the woman who performs miracles, Sanae-chan!”

Sanae wasn't planning on letting go of her ticket to the future here.

For that sake, she would become as strong as she had needed.

Love is All

Part 11

Koutarou stood holding Saguratin in both hands with Sanae by his back.

“I'm sorry, Koutarou.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“I'm going to be a little reckless so I wanted to say sorry before.”

“You're always being reckless, right?”

“Ehehe, oh right.”

Sanae let out a small laugh as she lightly pressed her hands onto Koutarou's back. She then closed her eyes and focused.

“Here I go, Koutarou.”

Sanae's voice didn't enter Koutarou's ears as sound waves; instead, he could hear it through spiritual waves like he had in the past.

“Sanae?”

“Long time no see, Koutarou.”

Along with the voice, a familiar figure appeared in front of Koutarou. It was the appearance of Sanae when she had been a ghost.

“Long time no see? What did you do!? You're behind me as well!”

Koutarou was astonished. There was a Sanae in front and behind him. The only difference between them was their age and hairstyle. Everything was precisely the same, and it was hard to tell them apart.

“Ehehehe, it's what you call an astral projection.”

The Sanae in the front smiled. She was the soul of Sanae being astral projected. The reason why she looked the same as before was because her imagining of that appearance was still stronger.

“Astral projection!?”

“Yeah. In the end, the best method to increase your spiritual energy is the method the ghost lady used.”

“What do you mean?”

“I will become one with you, Koutarou. By doing that, I can use more powers than simple additions.”

The Sanae in front of Koutarou put her hands on his chest. As she did, her body slowly sunk into Koutarou's body. And before long, she had completely entered his body.

“So that's what you mean by reckless.”

“Yeah. I might not be able to separate from you. If that happens, I'm sorry.”

There had been times where Sanae had been sleeping inside of Koutarou's body, but what Sanae was about do now was to take it a few steps further and merge with Koutarou. This would be her first try at this and she didn't know what might happen.

“We've done similar stuff up until now.”

“Ahaha, you're right.”

Love is All

Since they met, Sanae had always been with Koutarou. There had been times where they would be apart, but they spent the most of their time together. Koutarou thought that even if they couldn't separate now, it wouldn't be that much different.

“Okay, then I'm starting, Koutarou.”

“Yeah.”

Therefore, Koutarou was able to readily answer. He was not even the slightest scared of merging with Sanae.

“Eiya.”

Along with Sanae's cheer, Koutarou could feel someone entering his mind. Koutarou called out to that someone, but it wasn't with his voice, but with his thoughts.

"Is that you Sanae?"

"Yeah, can you tell?"

"Yes. It feels strange hearing a voice inside my head though."

"I'm going to hurry, okay? If I relax, I feel like I'll melt inside of you."

"That would be bad."

"Because you hate me?"

"You already know the answer, don't you?"

"Ehehe, I just figured it would be proper manners to pretend not to notice."

Having entered Koutarou's mind, Sanae overwrote his internal structure and connected their souls. As she did, their spiritual energy began passing through each other and increased in size.

“Oh, is this it!?”

An amazing amount of spiritual energy began pouring into Saguratin that Koutarou was gripping onto with both hands. Even Koutarou could tell that the amount was close to three times what had been inside before.

"Koutarou, I'll leave the attacking to you. I don't know much about stuff like that so I think it's best if you do it."

“Alright, I'll give it a shot.”

Koutarou readjusted his grip on Saguratin and pointed the tip of his sword towards the upper body of the monster still crawling around on the ground.

“Karama, Korama, let's start.”

“Okay Ho-!”

“The amplifying system has been activated Ho-! Whenever you are ready Ho-!”

Thanks to his merging with Sanae, all of Koutarou's abilities were amplified. He could see the spiritual energy flowing through Karama and Korama. With this power, they would be able to force the remaining evil spirits to pass on. Convinced of that, Koutarou raised his sword high.

"Koutarou."

But just before Koutarou swung his sword down, Sanae whispered to him. And so he stopped with the sword above his head.

"What is it?"

"There's something I want to tell you."

Love is All

"Can't you do it later?"

"I just felt that right now I can tell you without any misunderstanding. And there's no fear of anyone else overhearing."

"Then tell me. There's no time so try to be as concise as possible okay?"

There was already less than 30 seconds left, so there was no time to casually chat.

"Alright, then I'll say it okay? Ahem…"

Sanae stopped speaking and waited for a short time before continuing to steel herself. But once she put it into words, she did it at full force.

"I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you—"

There was just a single phrase Sanae wanted to tell Koutarou.

But the truth in those words were revealed by the spiritual energy's sudden increase. The amount of spiritual energy in Saguratin now was easily more than five times the amount that had been used when Koutarou was fighting the monster.

"Love is all, huh. You really are a handful…"

"Eh?"

Reacting to Koutarou mumbling, Sanae stopped speaking. But what stopped was just her words as her spiritual energy continued to increase. Sanae herself didn't notice that.

"It's nothing. Let's wrap up this job."

"Why are you laughing? Hey, Koutarou!"

Koutarou continued laughing and didn't give Sanae an answer. He then swung down Saguratin at full force.

The results need not be said.

One Small Step

Part 1

April 12, Monday

After watching the fight come to an end, Maki lowered her cane. At the same time, she cancelled a large amount of spells that she had prepared. Maki was prepared to do anything for Koutarou, but if it was revealed that she was his ally, she would find herself in a difficult position. But fortunately, there had been no turn for Maki to enter. Sanae had far more power hidden inside of her than Maki could have imagined.

“Here I was thinking that she was just a poor evil spirit controlled by a necromancer, but boy was I wrong. That power she showed at the end, though it was just for a moment, it was quite clearly on the levels of gods… Just what kind of god is that girl serving…”

In the past, Maki had thought that Sanae was a ghost being manipulated by Koutarou using necromancy. Thinking back to it, she realized what a huge misunderstanding she had made. Sanae was from an old, historical family of priests, and her inherited powers had manifested themselves. She could use spiritual energy, and an extreme amount at that. She couldn't fully control it all, but she was continually exceeding the human limit.

“…She was originally able to use spiritual abilities, but because her spiritual energy had been separated from her, she looked like an ordinary ghost.”

While observing Koutarou and the others, Maki analyzed Sanae's situation. That had been the reason she came to this place in the first place.

“It seems like she somehow managed to return as one, but in this modernized age, it seems even her family has lost their ability to use spiritual energy. That's why, although she has a lot of spiritual energy, she was just an ordinary girl. But once her memories as a ghost returned, she obtained the techniques needed to use spiritual energy…”

If Sanae hadn't recovered her memories, she would have probably just been a normal girl that could see ghosts. The reason she was able to use spiritual energy was probably thanks to her many years as a ghost. Her experience from being a ghost had allowed her to learn how to manipulate spiritual energy.

“The reason her memories returned may have been because a part of herself was still left inside Satomi-kun, or it might have been residual thoughts inside that charm. Or it could be both. In other words, she was in a situation where her memories would return if she was in danger.”

In the case that Sanae came into contact with Koutarou while his spiritual circuits were active, she would be able to indirectly access her own spiritual body.

And the charm she had always been wearing contained residual thoughts. This also made it possible for her to regain her memories.

One Small Step

In other words, Sanae only needed to come into contact with Koutarou's spiritual powers, or the memories contained in the charm. It meant that two backups had unintentionally been left behind.

“…I think I'll put something like that in my report.”

With her thoughts gathered, Maki turned her back towards Koutarou and the others. She couldn't let them know that she had been present.

“But, what a dull report. It was such a trivial matter.”

That had been the conclusion of the magician Darkness Navy of Rainbow Darkness. But Maki found that to be a boring conclusion. And so, Aika Maki came up with a different one.

“She got her memories back because her bond with Satomi-kun was strong. It was thanks to their strong emotions for one another that they were able to break through these hardships… this way is much more wonderful.”

If she said this to her allies in Darkness Rainbow, she would be laughed at. Even Maki herself would have laughed half a year ago. But right now, she knew that to be the truth. And the person she loved wouldn't laugh at her either.

“…It's your win, small evil spirit…”

Maki smiled gently and jumped into the darkness of the night.

“I am a little mortified, but I will let you have Satomi-kun for tonight. Fufufu.”

Nobody was around to hear Maki's laughter, but she was satisfied.

“…Ahh… the moon is very beautiful tonight…”

Maki was a magician of darkness that lived in the dark of night.

But right now, the moonlight turned into hope and gently shone down on her.

One Small Step

Part 2

With the battle over, Koutarou returned Saguratin to its sheath. He then pushed it back into the black hole that had appeared. It wasn't until he had let go off his sword that he was able to relax.

“Haah, it's finally over…”

It wasn't that a lot of time had passed, but a lot of things had happened, so Koutarou was mentally exhausted.

“This is great, Sanae-chan's memories returned!”

“I'm sorry for making you worry.”

“I wasn't sure what would happen for a moment, but now we're all back together.”

“This is truly marvelous.”

“Ho-, HoHo-!”

Amongst the many events, the biggest one was Sanae regaining her memories. This wasn't one of the events that had exhausted Koutarou, but it was the most surprising event of the night. In truth, Koutarou still couldn't believe it. He couldn't imagine being able to speak to Sanae like normal again was real.

“Satomi Koutarou, why do you look so surprised?”

“You wouldn't possibly say that you are unhappy that Sanae has returned.”

Noticing Koutarou's appearance, Theia and Kiriha spoke out.

“There's no way that I'm unhappy.”

Koutarou shook his head. He was happy that Sanae had gotten her memories back.

“But… I'm just a little surprised. To think—”

“To think that Sanae would really get her memories back, huh?”

Kiriha managed to say what Koutarou was thinking before he could put it into words. As a result, Koutarou ended up surprised once more.

“…Something like that.”

Koutarou nodded while hiding the fact that he was shaken.

“You are surprised that what you thought was impossible has happened. It's nothing less or more than that.”

That was when Theia called out to Koutarou.

“You are quick to give up…”

As Theia said that she smiled.

“Koutarou, could you tell me something.”

Her smile at this time was as gentle as a crimson tulip in blossom.

“Yeah.”

“If I were to leave your side… would you feel the same way as you did with Sanae? Would you believe that we would never meet again…?”

“Wha…”

One Small Step

Theia's words shook Koutarou once more. It was just like she had said. That was indeed what he believed. He believed that one day he would have to part ways with Theia, and that they would never meet again.

“Bullseye, huh.”

“…”

Just staying quiet was all Koutarou could do. But looking at gentle Theia's expression was, he figured that she had already noticed how shaken up he really was.

“Listen up, pleb. I promise you that no matter how far apart we might find ourselves, we will definitely meet again. And I will make you believe in that promise sooner or later.”

Theia's eyes were filled with confidence as she proudly declared so.

“Theia…”

“Well then, I will see you later. I will rejoice at my reunion with Sanae.”

Theia left before Koutarou could answer. Theia didn't care what Koutarou believed, because she was going to change that belief.

“Sanae, well done on coming back.”

“Theia! That's right, Theia, look, look! My breasts grew a little bigger, look at them!”

“W-Whaaaat!?”

Once Theia joined Sanae and the others, the group got a lot more noisy. And as he looked at them, Koutarou began thinking about something.

…Do they believe that these days will last forever…?

Looking at the girls, he couldn't imagine that they thought even once of the day that they would have to part ways. The girls laughed as if these days would last an eternity.

“…Hey, Kiriha-san.”

He wanted to confirm it.

And he felt like Kiriha would be able to give him an answer.

“Do you… no, do all of you believe that these days will never end?”

That might have been a question too vague for anyone but Kiriha to answer. But Kiriha knew of Koutarou's circumstances. So, she answered the question that Koutarou had intended to ask.

“At the very least, I do.”

Kiriha easily affirmed Koutarou's question.

“I want you to remember the girl called Kii. She believed that her mere three days of memories would see a continuation and so she waited for ten years.”

“…How can you believe so much? Didn't it ever occur to you that nothing might happen even if you believe?”

“Koutarou…”

Kiriha slowly smiled. It was a smile that was both deeply saddened and gentle. It was an expression made possible thanks to the fact that Kiriha knew everything about Koutarou.

“I would like to ask you the opposite. Why don't you believe? Why do you believe that you will not be rewarded for believing? Why don't you imagine a future with others?”

“That's…”

One Small Step

Koutarou couldn't answer. Speaking the answer to that question would be the same as accepting all of his weaknesses. But Koutarou had forgotten.

“…Koutarou, I want you to think this as a message from Kii.”

He had forgotten that Kiriha had forgiven all of his weaknesses in the past.

“Onii-chan, please… Don't think that everyone will meet such as sad of an ending as your mother…”

And now, Kiriha was forgiving Koutarou's weaknesses once more.

“…”

Koutarou was unable to say anything. That was because Kiriha's words sounded like the truth to him.

“…That is all I can say.”

With that, Kiriha ended the discussion and her expression returned to normal. Sanae and the others who had been amusing themselves by chatting approached the two.

“Let's go home, Koutarou, Kiriha!”

“I am so very hungry.”

“Kiriha, make me food!”

“I almost forgot, we made a promise like that, didn't we?”

“Yeah!”

After exchanging a few words with Kiriha on the way, Sanae ran up to Koutarou. She then extended her arms straight out and jumped as hard as she could.

“Koutarou!”

Using the momentum from running, Sanae clung onto Koutarou's neck. But shortly after, she separated a little and looked into Koutarou's eyes before speaking to him.

“Let's return to our home.”

Those words left Sanae's words in a very natural fashion.”

“Sanae…”

Hearing that, Koutarou froze up. Sanae was smiling as if days like these would continue on forever.

“What are you freezing up for? She said let's go home.”

While Koutarou was frozen, Theia spoke to him. As she did, Koutarou remembered her words from just a moment ago.

“Listen up, pleb. I promise you that no matter how far apart we might find ourselves, we will definitely meet again. And I will make you believe in that promise sooner or later.”

Theia believed that there would be no end to these days.

And so did Kiriha.

“If we don't hurry home, dinner will be delayed even further.”

Kiriha smiled, and a girl called Kii was always lurking behind that smile.

“Onii-chan, please… Don't think that everyone will meet such as a sad ending as your mother…”

One Small Step

After just three days, that girl had believed that they would meet again and that their lives would continue on forever. Those feelings had guided her to this place, and now she stood here smiling.

“What's wrong Koutarou? Are you not feeling good? Is it because we merged!?”

Worried about Koutarou who wasn't speaking, Sanae poked out her face again.

“You're wrong. It won't end just because you die.”

“And you won't be alone. Someone somewhere out there is watching over you. I know that.”

“Yeah. I don't think this world's god is such a strict person.”

Koutarou remembered the words that had been whispered during the battle. Sanae believed that there would be no end to these days. And it was because she believed that that she had been able to return to Koutarou and the others.

“That's right, Sanae-chan, I recorded the continuation of Love Love Heart.”

“Once we get back, I'll give you those clothes you wanted. You'll finally be able to wear them.”

“Then we'll need to adjust their length a little. I will prepare the sewing set.”

Yurika, Shizuka and Ruth surely believed that as well.

One Small Step

One Small Step

“Really!? Koutarou, let's hurry back! There's so much to do!”

That's why an unexpected thought, asking if Koutarou shouldn't believe in that as well, jumped into his mind.

Of course, it might not be possible right away. Changing the way someone lived their life was hard. Changing the direction of something required a lot of work and time.

But Koutarou felt like he should take at least the first step towards that. For the sake of those with expectations of him, and for the sake of his own future.

“…Let's do that.”

“Yeah! Let's go home!”

And as for Koutarou's first step.

“Sanae.”

“Hm? What?”

What he did was the same thing, but the feelings behind it were different.

“…Welcome back, Sanae.”

“Koutarou…”

Koutarou decided that changing his actions all of a sudden would be hard, so he started by changing his feelings.

“Ehehehe, this is the first time you've spoken so lovingly…”

“This is?”

“Yeah…”

Performing the same actions with new feelings.

“…I'm back, Koutarou…”

Embracing the small girl who had managed to return after going through hell in his arms was just a very small step.

One Small Step

Part 3

The invader girls passed through the gate to the Higashihongan family grounds so that they could adjust the clothes Sanae had gotten from Shizuka and to take the measures of Yurika's costume.

Since Sanae was smaller than Shizuka, she couldn't wear the clothes she had been given just like that. And since Sanae had been jealous of Yurika's costume, they decided to take those measurements at the same time. By the way, with this being their goal, Koutarou wasn't going with them.

“Sanae-chan.”

“Yes?”

“Since you have such an amazing home, you don't really need the ownership of room 106, don't you?”

“No way would I give that up. That's that and this is this.”

“That's just unfair~”

It was only obvious that Yurika would grieve; the Higashihongan family grounds were larger than a baseball stadium if you included the hills behind her home. Sanae was actually a rich lady.

Even after passing under the gate, Sanae's home was still a bit away. Her mansion was down the avenue and past a stone bridge. Though land was cheap in the provinces, it was quite clear that the Higashihongan family had quite the financial power.

“My Kurano family's home is about 70% of this.”

“Having 70% of this underground is amazing, Kiriha!”

“The home of the head maid in the resort north of Mastir was about this size.”

“Now that you mention it… it's been awhile since we last met.”

“That's unfair, all of you~”

Theia, Ruth, Kiriha and Sanae all had considerable assets and could be considered rich. There was a large financial gap between them and the self-proclaimed magical girl of love and courage, Yurika.

“Now now, Yurika-chan, there's no need to get depressed.”

“Even you have Corona House, Shizuka-san. I only have a wardrobe. Uuuuhh.”

Yurika held her cane against the chest of her costume and shed tears.

Truth be told, many of the girls around her wanted to live in that wardrobe Yurika was living in. Yurika remained unaware of just how blessed she really was.

As this continued, the group reached the entrance to the mansion. There, a woman in her late thirties wearing a kimono was waiting.

“Welcome everyone. Thank you for always taking care of my Sanae.”

The woman deeply bowed her head.

This courteous woman was Sanae's mother.

“And you even have such a wonderful mom. My mom is just…”

Without even properly greeting Sanae's mother, Yurika started feeling envious. Everything she had seen since crossing the front gate had only served to stimulate her complex.

“Oh?”

Sanae's mother's eyes stopped on Yurika.

“That cane…”

The next moment, her eyes narrowed.

Oh no!? I must have done something again!

Yurika noticed the change in Sanae's mother's expression before anyone else and feared that she had been the reason. She was sure that she had broken some kind of peculiar rule only rich people would have.

“I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry for coming to play when I'm poor! I didn't mean any harm!”

And so Yurika apologized while on the verge of tears. Sanae's mother was scary, but Yurika was more scared of being scolded by Koutarou later.

“Could you be…?”

However, Sanae's mother's expression soon loosened up. She showed a nostalgic smile as if she had seen an old friend.

“Could you be Nana-chan's friend?”

“Eeeeh? D-Do you know Nana-san!?”

It was a fated meeting.

Yurika and Sanae's mother had a common acquaintance.

“No way!? Mama, were you a cosplayer!?”

“…Eh?”

“Could the reason you were in the archery club in school be because you wanted their outfit!?”

“C-Cosplay?”

However, that fated meeting created an odd atmosphere between Sanae and her mother.

Afterword

Long time no see everybody. It's the author, Takehaya.

This time I have been able to safely deliver volume 11. This time the story centered around what happened to Sanae's body and about Koutarou's mentality. Sanae is a ghost and she has a fate that she can never escape. How will Sanae face that fate? And at that time, what does Koutarou and the invader girls think about it? That is the theme of this volume.

That's right, regarding the exceptions mentioned in the story. Only two exceptions were mentioned, but that was from the speaker's perception, and it wasn't related to the truth. In fact, there are about one and a half more exceptions. Since I suspect that might have confused some readers I decided to at least touch on it. Well, it's obvious who it might be though (lol)

This is the first episode focused around Sanae since volume 3. There are a total of ten volumes in between these two, so I believe I may have irritated all of the Sanae fans out there. But this was time necessary to develop Sanae's theme. If I didn't develop a strong enough bond between the two, I feared that it might leave everyone behind. If I tried something like this during the fourth or fifth volume, I'm sure the readers couldn't sympathize the way they can now. I believe that this story was only possible because Sanae had spent such long time with Koutarou and everyone else. And I hope everyone else can feel the same way.

Since I don't have much room for this afterword I will wrap it up here.

Finally, I would like to thank the editorial department for working so hard to help publish these books, to Poco-san who always draws great illustrations, my friends who takes me out drinking during my slumps and to all the readers who warmly watch over me.

Then let us meet again in the afterword for Volume 12.

September, 2012 Takehaya

Article 15
As a general rule, the existences under Satomi Koutarou's (resident of room 106) protection, are to be treated as his relatives.

Article 15 Postscript
Please, don't throw them out, okay?